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News. Clues. Kingdom views.

CHRISTIANCOURIER



CRC Pastors take a step back from Christian schools

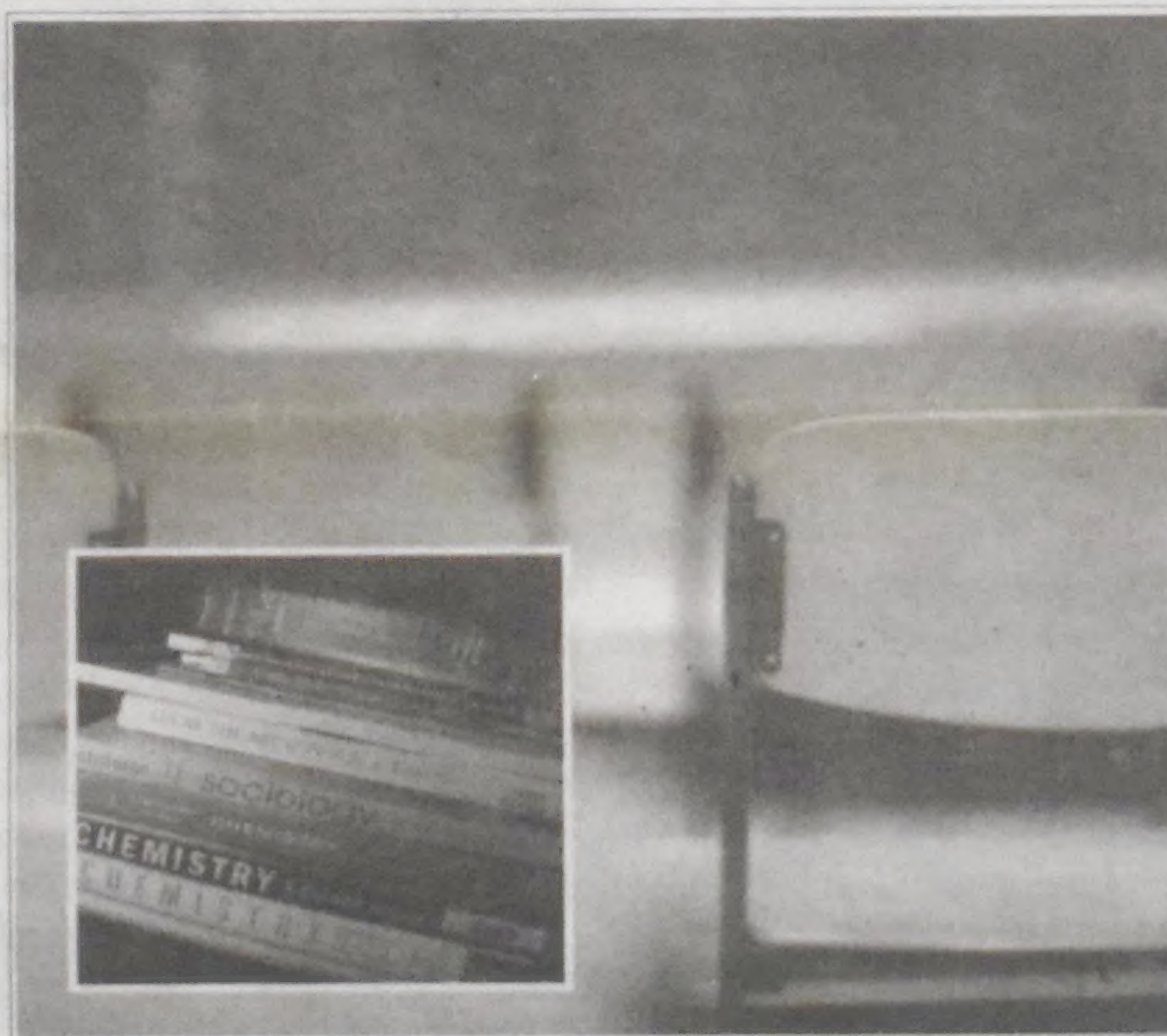
Peter Schuurman

As thrift-stores are to the Salvation Army, as pacifism is to the Mennonites, so are Christian schools to the lifeblood of the CRCNA. It is our gift to diversify the Canadian cultural landscape. Yet Christian schooling in Canada calls for sweaty determination; this is particularly true in Ontario and the Maritime provinces, where no public funds are provided for private schools. In his chronicle entitled *To All Our Children: The Story of Post-war Dutch Immigration to Canada*, Albert Van der Mey writes of the mothers of Christian school students in Chatham in the 1950s who would pick tomatoes through the harvest season in order to earn money to pay their children's tuition. From bazaars to auctions to flower sales, faith still works. Hard.

The infrastructure of this com-

munal witness is remarkable. In 1943 the first Christian school opened in Ontario – in the Holland Marsh. Today, there are approximately 70 such (OACS) schools across the province instructing some 11,000 students, and that institution building does not include Redeemer University or the Institute for Christian Studies or other related agencies like Edifide, Worldwide Christian Schools or OACS. All this was accomplished in the face of a mostly hostile dominant culture, a culture declared “discriminatory” by the U.N. human rights committee.

Hints of that antipathy have diffused into Christian Reformed circles, and the vision for the Christian schooling project requires constant reinvigoration. Classis Huron of the CRCNA set in their agenda last January a 90 minute discussion on



Sixty percent of the pastors we polled have had kids in public or Catholic schools at some point.

Christian schools are a participation in God's mission in his world.

the role of congregations with regards to these independent Christian schools. The discussion was prompted by years of requests on the classis credentials for conversation around the fact that a number of ministers in the classis do not send their children to Christian schools. Some classis leaders are obviously puzzled by this, as it shakes some taken-for-granted expectations in our Reformed circles. Can we talk about this as brothers and sisters?

School shift

I was asked to facilitate the Huron Classis discussion and I prepared by phoning all pastors in the
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Higher education fails online

Philip Christman

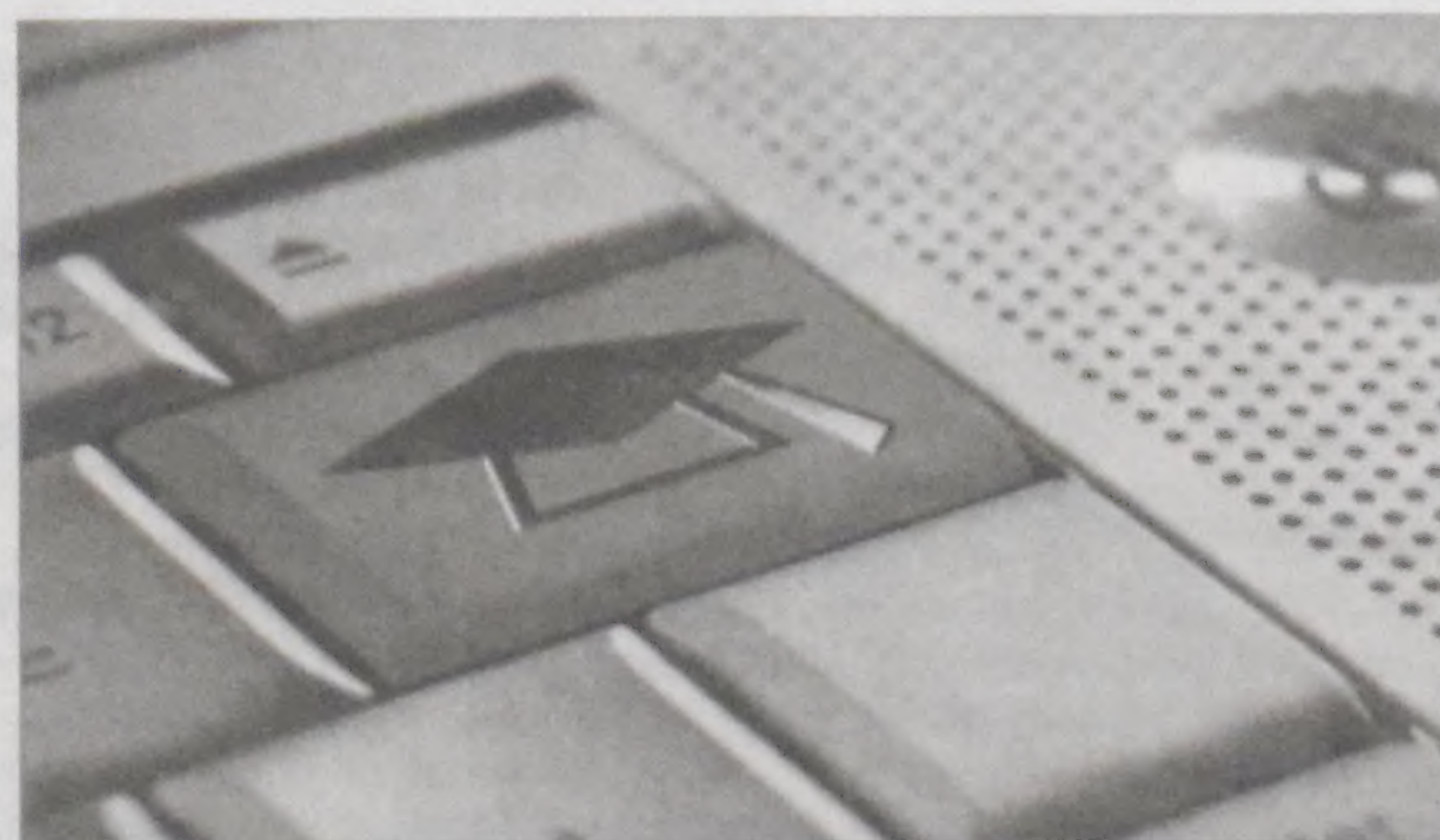
Fundamentalists are often assumed to lack any sort of intellectual life or culture. In my experience, this isn't true. My father is both one of the smartest men I've ever met and a fundie right down to his (unevolved) toenails; and he taught me, by word and example, that research, argument and thinking were important, because they could help in serving the single goal that fundamentalism proposes to hang over all of life: the making of converts.

By the time I was ready for college, this view of life had begun to cramp me. To be told, again

and again, by my fellow churchgoers, that my interest in writing was valuable because (and, it was implied, *only* because) it might help “win souls” was to feel something I loved, again and again, reduced to an instrument. The Susan Sontag for fundamentalists of my generation – the person who explained modern literature and art to us in ways that would make a more general appreciation possible – was the conservative Presbyterian thinker Francis Schaeffer, apparently a generous and cultivated man in his private life but, in his books, little more than a cataloguer of ways in which Kant or

Walt Whitman or the Beatles got God wrong. At 18, I didn't want a list of thoughts to avoid, but a list of thoughts to explore. More than that, I wanted what fundamentalism, with its single-minded focus on salvation as a moment and not a way of life, could never give me: a rich account of how such exploration might relate to the God revealed in Jesus.

I gained a lot of things by going to Calvin College. But the most important was that explanation: We seek to know because we are made in the image of the ultimate Maker and Knower. Knowledge is an end, not a means.



Online courses are not bad. They're better than nothing. But they simply can't replicate the higher education experience.

Why commit to college?

That answer is not the world's answer. The world tells us that we

learn to accrue social capital; to further the Revolution; to increase
Continued on page 2

News

CRC Pastors take a step back from Christian schools *continued*

classis to ask about their schooling situation – personally and congregationally. The journalistic data I gathered is indicative of a shift in CRC circles – a shift towards greater diversity in resources, commitments and sensitivities concerning Christian schooling. All pastors testified that they were supportive of the project of Christian schooling to some degree. Out of 20 non-retired ordained ministers with children, eight have had only Christian schooling for their children so far. The 12 other pastors may have had their kids in Christian school but at some point they switched to public or Catholic schools. One pastor's children are home schooled until Grade 8, after which time they attend the public high school. So more than half make use of government-funded schools, but almost all have had some experience with their children in a Christian school.

Reasons for choosing publicly funded schools vary: some expressed a commitment to be more missionally involved in their local community. Some cited specific needs for their child (French immersion, specific sports teams). For others there were irreconcilable differences with the local Christian school leadership over issues like bullying or bussing. In combination with the above reasons many described the financial strain of Christian school tuition and the burden of bussing long distances.

While the pastors were quick to name isolationist tendencies with Christian school families, none recognized an opposite and perhaps more subtle danger: a comfortable acculturation to secular Canadian society. Calvin College professor Jamie Smith has said in an OACS interview, "Immigrant and ethnic communities . . . have now been here long enough that they are undergoing the dynamics of assimilation. So they have to ask themselves anew, why do we value Christian education?"

New tensions

The numbers above may not be as significant as the stories I heard on the phone. Different schooling choices in a congregation fuel tension and conflict. "We have experienced a lot of judgment from others," said one. "We have been hurt by Christian school advocates with regards to this issue," said another. "We've lost close friends over this."

Those who are ardent Christian school supporters echo the pain. "We have pastored members who have cried about this." Another minister said, after a few awkward experi-



The vision for Christian schooling requires constant reinvigoration.

ences: "I've learned to bite my tongue." The friction ripples through the church: "It's a volatile subject . . . we've had blow-ups in council meetings."

Beyond the struggle for cordial relations in church, pastors expressed some ambivalence for the project of Christian schools. Some pastors said that all the institution building for Christian schools drained their churches of time, talents and funding for church ministry; some suggested it was a barrier to church growth as converts could never understand the project. Some complained that the Christian school was too withdrawn from society, and was losing its culture-engaging kingdom vision to a more moralistic, pietistic vision. Another said that the graduates do not turn out any different, and public schools force students to personally own their faith, unlike the passive taken-for-granted faith of the Christian schools.

Some admitted that public schooling had its own strains. Finding good friends, especially Christian friends, was difficult. Certain behaviours, like smoking pot, were much more acceptable, and since parents do not share common

values, cooperating on student extra-curricular boundaries was less workable. But many reported that their public school experience, on the whole, has been positive.

Examining the evidence

For many, it's time to ask whether the historical connection between church and school needs to be let go. The umbilical cord needs to be cut as our schools mature. But history has shown that when schools lose their particular denominational identity, they begin the slippery slope to "Christian values" and eventually only humanistic values. Additionally, the older churches in North America that have no school system are also churches that are dying: the mainline churches. The younger churches have yet to prove their endurance value. Now it's certainly a complex equation involving fertility rates, evangelistic fervour and theological vitality; but on the whole, there has been a symbiosis between church and school that short-term thinking may overlook at its peril.

No one mentioned the Cardus Education Survey released last fall, which gives more than anecdotal evidence regarding the outcomes of Christian schooling. Based on the self-reports of over 2,000 high school alumni aged 23-39, Cardus (with the help of Angus Reid pollsters) concluded that Christian school graduates were more committed church members, more neighbourly, more likely to vote and were married earlier, had more kids and less divorces than their government-funded counterparts. They were less likely to be involved in protests or environmental activism, and proportionally are less likely to attend elite universities or get Ph.D.s, but on average, they seem to contribute at least as much if not more to the common good in our society (See *Christian Courier* Nov. 12, 2012).

This affirmation of the fruitfulness of Christian schooling should come as no surprise. Roman Catholics, Jews, Muslims and Mormons all recognize that faith-based schooling is fundamental in the retention of religious identity. If an identity is not passionately bequeathed to young souls, they are left to cobble together fragments of identity from those who market their wares most aggressively or seductively.

Why focus on pastors and their schooling choices? Ministers are a mirror of the congregation, a bellwether of shifting loyalties and priorities.

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Higher education fails online *continued*

likelihood of reproductive success; to make more money. In the U.S., all of these assumptions are often subsumed under a noble-sounding one: the end of education is to democratize society by increasing social mobility.

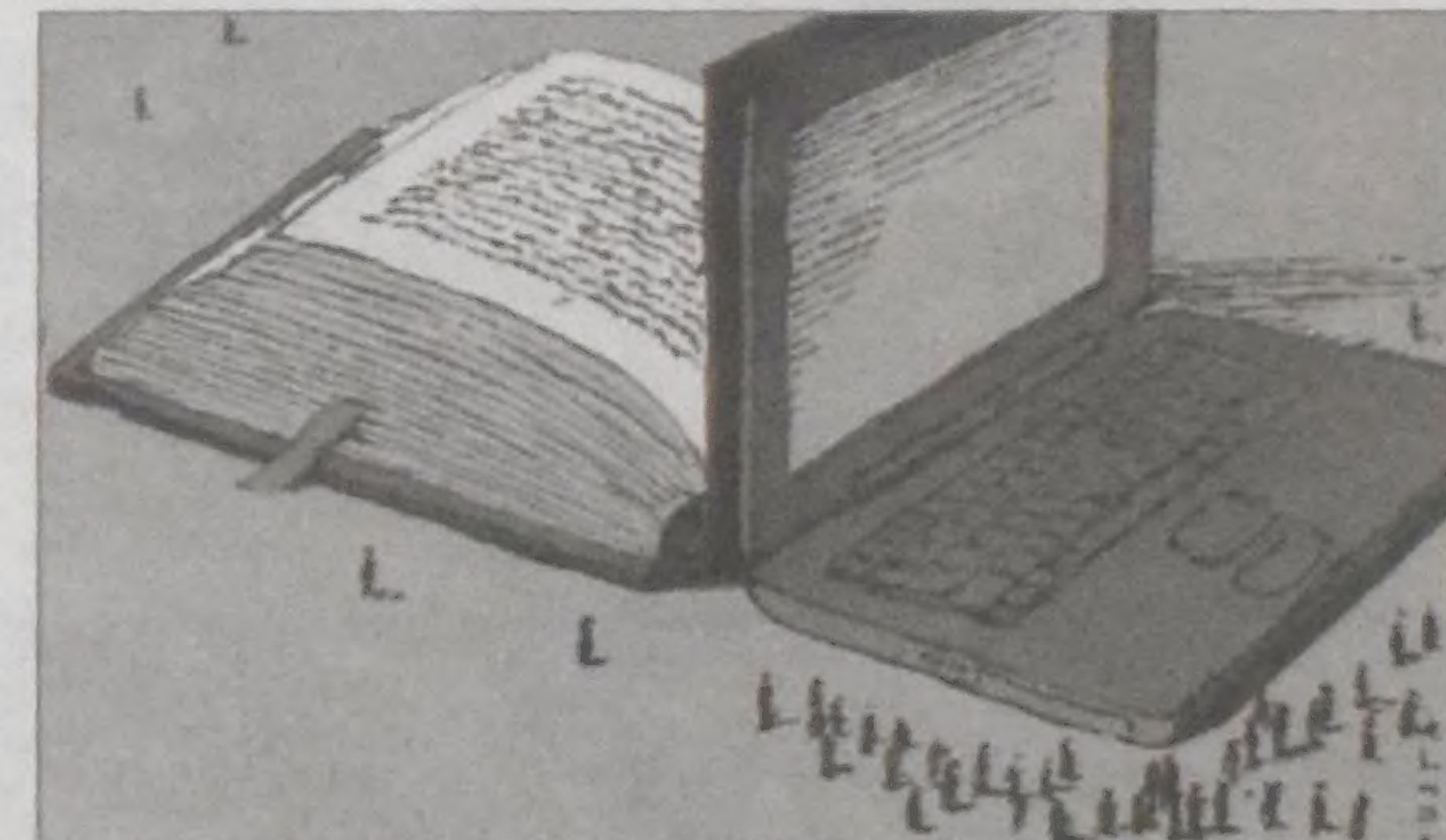
Now, I think social mobility is a perfectly good reason for a society to invest in higher education. Some critics scorn it as a "materialistic" concern, but those people have likely never spent a summer cleaning grease traps at a suburban Burger King. I am certainly grateful for the social mobility that Calvin gave me, which saved me from a constrained working-class existence in the cultural backwater of central Michigan. (I must add, though, that I wouldn't have gained so much of it if I hadn't been primarily – indeed obsessively – interested in my books. Life often works like that: If you shoot for the stars, you may just get as far as the moon.)

When, in April of this year, a California legislator proposed that students at state schools be allowed, in certain cases, to earn college credit by enrolling in Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs), we heard quite a bit about how such programs will "increase access" to higher education, and, thus, social mobility. (That they could also devastate an entire industry was glossed over. So was the fact that, in some analyses, universal free public higher education turns

out to be surprisingly cheap.) Now, MOOCs in themselves are not bad. I've taken a few myself. You log in, watch a few video lectures, do some problem sets, take a quiz. They are better than nothing, in the same way that a phone call from my wife, when she's out of town, is better than talking to a wall. But the idea that MOOCs can replicate the higher education experience makes no more sense than the idea that phone calls alone constitute a marriage.

The in-real-life classroom

My Calvin education can hardly be reduced to a series of movie clips and online quizzes. It was late nights (and early mornings) in the college newspaper office. It was reading a particular assignment very carefully because I wanted to impress a female classmate with my arguments. It was listening to Dr. Anker lecture outdoors on a pollen-filled spring afternoon about Henry David Thoreau's sacred anger against the strictures of polite society, until one guy decided to embody Thoreau's point with an impromptu dive into the sem pond. It was Dr. Ward weeping, every two years – he couldn't help it – when he lectured on the ending of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*. It was Dr. Saupe buying me a sandwich because she thought I looked a little thin. It was Dr. Sterk shepherding me through my first-ever academic



MOOCs are billed as "higher education for the masses" when real-world opportunities to go to university are being cut," Peter Scott argued in The Guardian this month.

conference. It was Ward, Saupe, Sterk and Dr. Fackler steering me toward open jobs that were right for me.

It was Dr. Felch calling me in to her office when she learned that I'd been suffering from anxiety attacks, and talking with me for *three hours*.

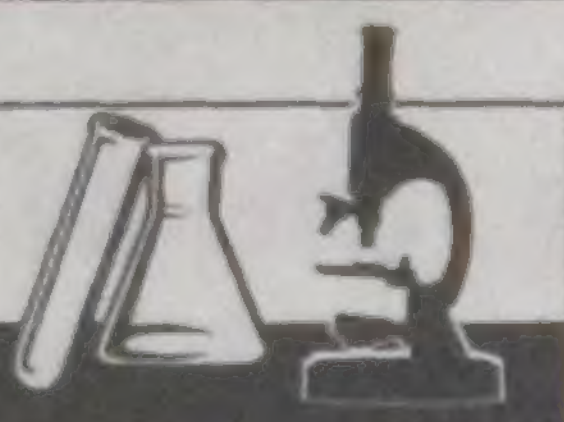
These sorts of experiences *just were* my college education. And they were, not incidentally, the source of the so-

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Column

From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom



Academia's glass ceiling

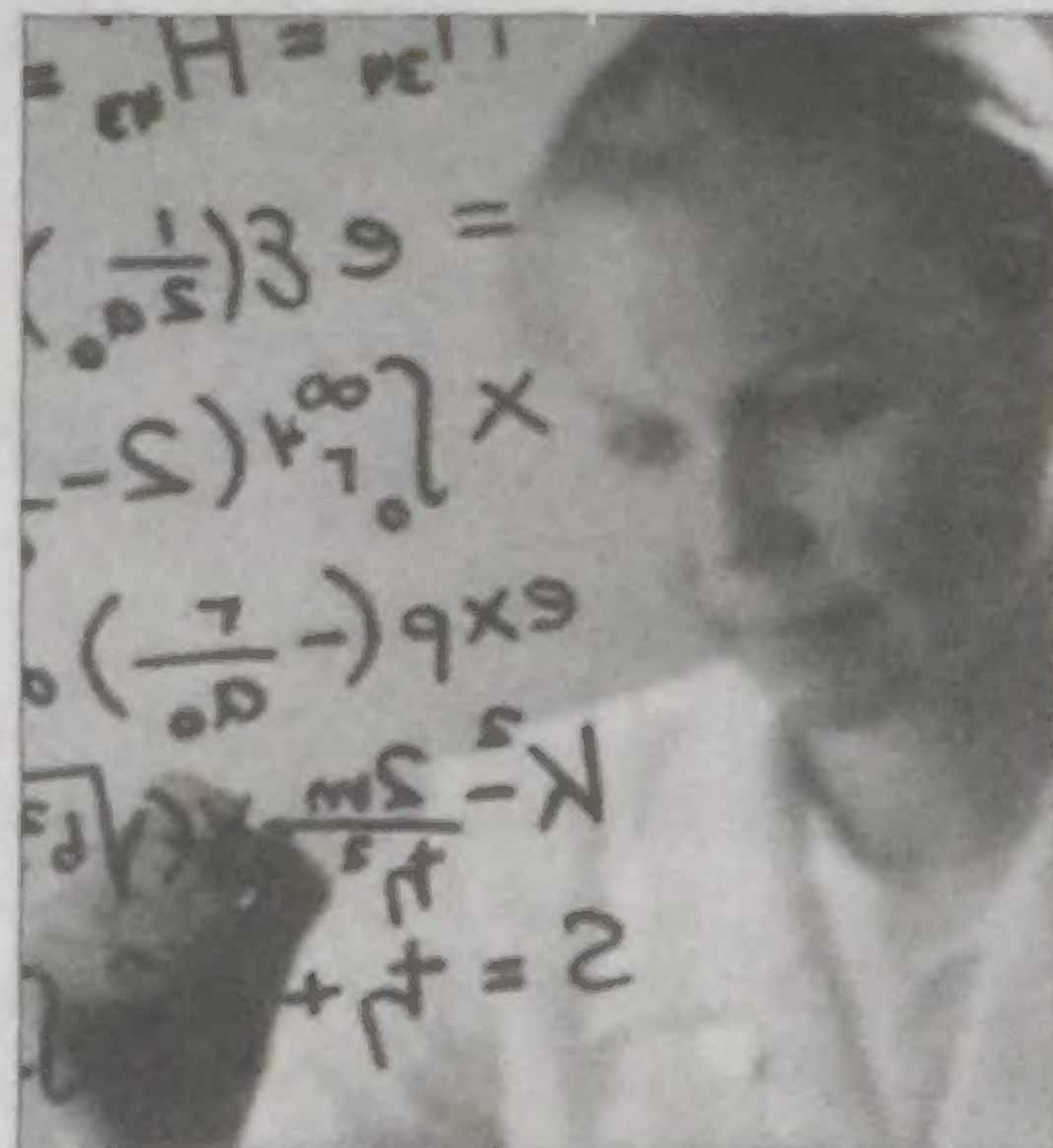
What female professors face



For at least 30 years, we in the Christian Reformed Church have been engaging in discussion about women in

church office. At its best the discussion has centered on issues of Bible interpretation: how do we read certain passages of Scripture? People of good faith differ, some arguing that the sweep of Scripture suggests that all church offices should be open to women, others arguing that certain Scripture passages preclude women from having roles of authority in the church. When sincere Christians hold differing opinions, the body of Christ suffers, but both sides of the argument are worthy of respect and hold their opinions honestly. We are struggling in our church with how to live together while hold differing opinions on what may or may not be an important matter.

In the scientific community there are also issues around gender and careers, but the nature of the concern is different. It has long been known that women are under-represented in all the sciences and are at a systemic disadvantage in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields. Compared to men, women are paid less, are generally less successful in getting research funds and not



Female professors in the sciences earn less and receive fewer grants than males.

as many move up to senior positions. In the academic and scientific communities, these realities are recognized and widely agreed to be problems needing correction.

The problem we face in the academic community is how to redress these gender-based inequalities. The low percentage of female university faculty is a concern, especially since at many levels of education more females than males graduate. According to Statistics Canada's 2011 National Household Survey, among 25- to 34-year-olds, 59 percent of the Bachelor's degrees are held by women, 62 percent of the medical degrees, 58 percent of the Master's degrees and 47 percent of the PhDs. Given these figures, one might expect to see a correction of the number im-

balance between male and female faculty. But generally it appears that this correction is not happening as fast as expected. Why not? Two problems have become apparent in trying to address this issue.

Quotas and a hidden bias

In my department at Laurier about 10 years ago, there were so few female professors that we asked for, and received, permission to advertise for and hire only women candidates. This strategy generated a firestorm of controversy. We usually seek to hire the best candidate; only if two candidates are deemed more or less equal do we hire the female to correct a gender imbalance. Our advertisement and hiring were believed by many to undercut the principle of hiring only the best candidates. Females who applied wondered if they were being hired because they were the best qualified or because they were female. In our case, the women faculty hired under this program proved to be excellent professors, and we were very lucky to get the people we did. However, so great was the controversy that after a few hires we terminated the restriction. This is an example of the first problem in addressing the gender imbalance: a quota system does not work very well.

The second, connected problem has been uncovered by a recent survey of American faculty (Ca-

nadian faculty would produce a similar result, I expect). Faculty at a number of research-intensive universities were asked to rate a potential job applicant for the position of research laboratory manager, a job held by many senior undergraduates before they undertake advanced degree programs. Faculty were asked to rate the applicant's competence, suggest a salary and decide how worthy the candidate was of mentoring. All the faculty received identical application material, except that in half of the applications the student was identified as *John*, the other half as *Jennifer*. According to both male and female faculty, John was rated as more competent, was recommended for a higher salary (\$29,900 for males vs. \$26,000 for females), and was

deemed more worthy of mentoring than Jennifer. This study reveals a hidden bias that benefits males. This gender bias has been documented in other research findings and makes the "if equal, hire the female" argument problematic.

Thus, while all agree that the gender imbalance in academic positions is a problem needing correction, its solution has proven difficult.

I wonder: does the same bias exist in the CRC's ongoing discussion about women's appropriateness for church office?

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca), who wonders if he was hired because he is male, is a member of the Waterloo CRC and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University.

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Higher education fails online *continued*

cial mobility I mentioned earlier: those resume-building freelance jobs would not have been made available to me by a professor I knew only in the way that I know my Twitter followers.

MOOCs only do half the job a good college course does, when it comes to education; when it comes to improving a person's economic prospects, not even one percent. What MOOCs do make possible is the application to higher ed of a paradigm that dominates much of U.S. life: they allow state money to be funneled, however indirectly, to the private investors who own most of the established MOOC providers. Let me be clear: I'm not accusing anyone of venality. U.S. intellectuals and policy makers now believe in these sorts of public-private

wealth transfers with the same disinterested fervor that they once believed in beating communism. We believe in markets more than we believe in education.

Gloria Deo

Which brings me back to Calvin College.

The details of Calvin's financial scandal aren't entirely clear. But if I were going to bet on anything, it would be this: nobody involved in this mess acted from personal greed. When profit-making is assumed to be a legitimate goal of any and every human activity, even religious schools, why *not* use your loan-payback savings to score a few extra dividends? Money is useful and more money more so. It's a perfectly natural decision in a culture deeply convinced that profit-seeking is the fundamental human activity.

Nineteenth-century U.S. Chris-

tians brought books and tools to swamps and mudholes and built tiny religious colleges all over the Midwest, then admitted women and African Americans in defiance of every social norm. They didn't do this because they were rational utility maximizers. They did it because they believed education would protect people against enslavement (which is, I might mention, the ultimate social mobility), and because they believed learning glorifies God. One of the things I learned at Calvin is that educators who genuinely believe this tend to do quite a bit both for students' minds *and* their prospects. I worry future children won't have the option of learning that fact from Calvin. I know they'll never learn it from a MOOC.



Phil Christman teaches first-year English at the University of Michigan.



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Letters

The time has come

I'd like to thank the editor and staff of *Christian Courier* for devoting much of the July 8, 2013 issue to the challenging topic of homosexuality and all that this discussion raises. For this reason I'd like to submit the following:

The time has come: that we need to revisit the key bible passages cited (especially in Frank DeVries' article). To begin with, Rom. 1: 21-31 has to be read in its total context – something that is so often lacking when we deal with this issue. Vs. 22 & 23 provide the all-important lead, namely that because of the exchange of God's glory to shameful and degrading ways in life where God has now given the God-less life to all the corrupt issues that Paul mentions. In this context he deals not merely with homosexuality but much more: evil, greed, depravity, envy, murder, strife . . . and many more such base issues. In today's context this would include such matters as the Gay Pride Parade, which to my mind is part of such perversion.

However, in my decades of pastoral ministry and "putting a face on real people," I have come to recognize that there are sincere homosexual Christians who do not fall at all in the description of Rom. 1:21-31. They have deeply struggled with the fact that although they love the Lord, have in no way turned away from him, love the Christian

faith and its Reformed expression, love the Church, they nonetheless deal daily with the fact of their sexual disposition and practice. Such people whom I've dealt with in considerable number have fought against their own sexual position but know full well that this is their inclination nonetheless. They absolutely do not belong to Paul's Romans 1 description!

When Paul writes in other passages (1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:9-11, as examples) he clearly describes many debase and perverse situations where people have become God-"opposers" and demonstrate in their daily existence how this is all expressed. It would be simple and easy to merely categorize our sincere homosexual members as living perverse lives in disobedience to our Lord, but I for one as a pastor can in no way justify such an unscriptural approach.

Time-bound

The time has come: that we honestly need to recognize that there are even parts of scripture that are "time-bound." A clear example of such a time-bound situation is in Paul's instruction, Eph. 6: 5-9, to slaves and masters who must treat each other with full respect due to the call of obedience to Christ. Not one of us today would dare to use this passage to defend what was permissible

and acceptable in Paul's time, in other words a clear situation of a wrong treatment in the past even though it is used by Paul as a fully acceptable societal norm for Christians.

In light of such time-bound examples from the New Testament, can we not honestly admit that were the apostle to have had the background information we have today as to the cause of the sincere struggle with homosexuality that he would have expanded his God-given teaching to recognize the sincere and dedicated Christian homosexual person, and encouraged them in their identity and practice? We all need to be honest in dealing with and accepting the Christian who sincerely struggles with his/her sexual identity and refuse to use select passages of scripture to somehow justify outright condemnation of his/her situation.

The time has come: that the CRCNA community no longer use the formula, "love the sinner, but hate the sin," a basic formula from the 1973 Synod Report on Homosexuality. What this formula has meant for many honest and sincere homosexual Christians is that they feel shunned, not understood or fully accepted, and placed somehow in a 'cast-out' part of church life – many of them

have left the fellowship and communion of the church as a result of this attitude. As the Synod 2013 has decided to study the entire issue of homosexuality further, including such matters as same-sex marriage, etc., we need most certainly to get away from this unacceptable formula.

The time has come: that we continue to dialogue openly and not condemn readily for in obedience to Scripture and its instructions we need to carry on with the context of the authors such as Paul in order to realize and recognize the place and acceptance of our sincere homosexual sisters and brothers.

Henry Numan, pastor emeritus,
Vancouver, B.C.

Dangerous ground

I could not believe what I read in the article "Winnipeg Christians say 'I'm sorry' to gay community" (July 8, 2013). Christians on the sidelines with banners at the Gay Pride parade? As Christians, we need to stay away from this immoral event.

Ted Bruinsma
Brampton, Ont.

The role of culture in worship *continued*

But not in the way that my Eastern Orthodox friend wants to do it. Human development, human shaping of everything we touch must be acknowledged and encouraged.

Cultural influences

I like the Nairobi Statement on worship and culture (see footnote). It focuses on the biblical and historical foundations of the relationship between Christian worship and culture. The authors of this statement point out that Christian worship interacts with culture in four dynamic ways. First, worship is trans-cultural; in other words, there is content in worship that is the same for all cultures. Second, it is contextual, as it connects to the local culture. Third, it is counter-cultural in that it stands opposed to whatever is deformed in culture. Finally, it is cross-cultural as it opens itself up to expressions from different local cultures.

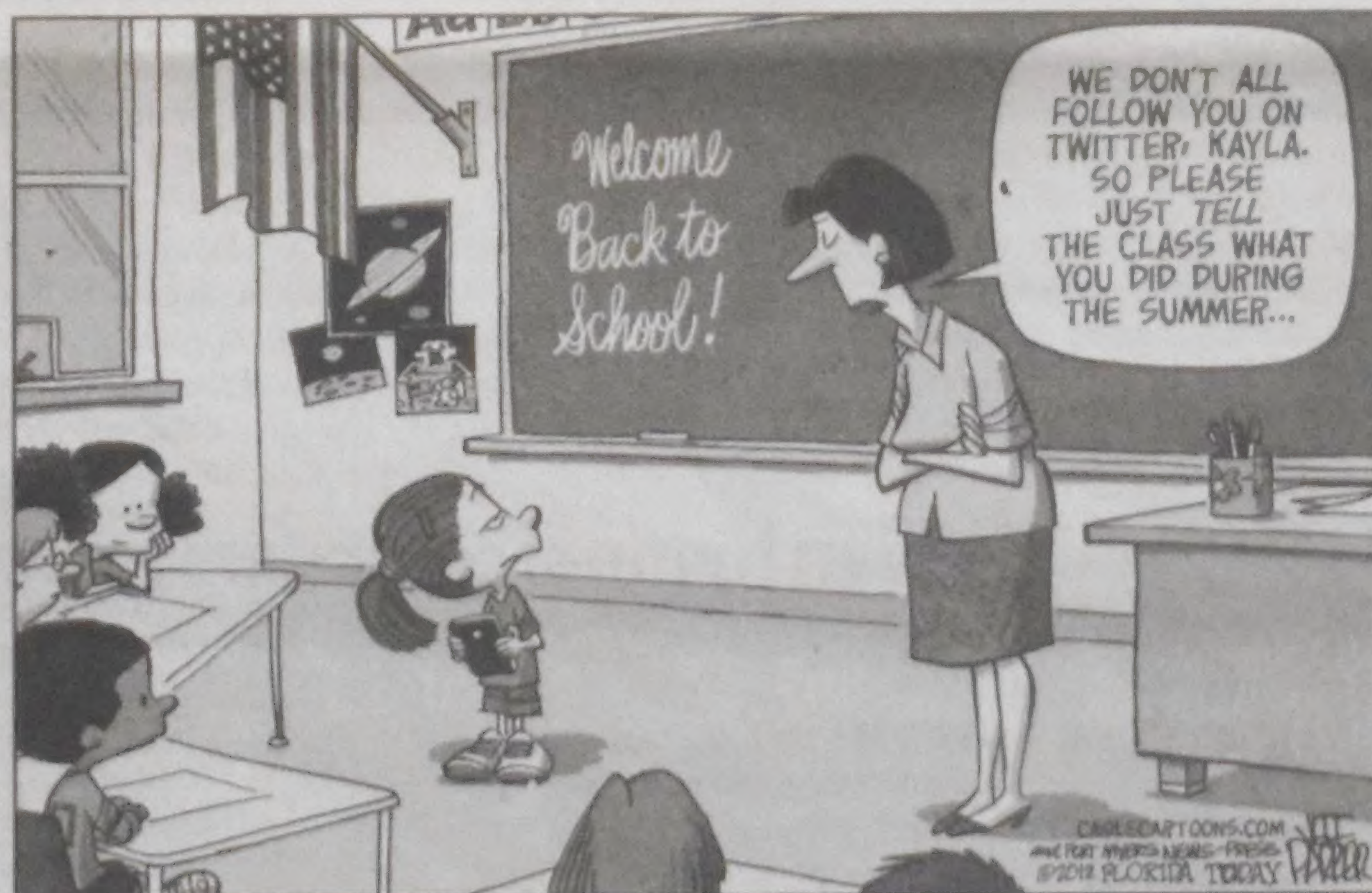
To my young friends who think worship should connect with contemporary pop culture, I would ask them to consider the richness of worship that is also trans-cultural as well as counter-cultural. Such worship connects us with the church of all ages (trans-cultural) and reminds us that our own culture needs to be judged in the light of the Word of God (counter-cultural).

To my older brother who considers worship in the Eastern Orthodox Church to be the divinely inspired format for all times and ages, I would ask him to consider the challenge of the Nairobi Statement to make worship contextual regarding time and place as well as cross-cultural, enriched by other traditions. No church or denomination has the final word on how to best worship our loving and sovereign Triune God. We can learn from each other and respect each other.

What a relief to be able to sing after the reading of the Ten Commandments (trans-cultural) "Perdón, Señor" (cross-cultural). I know, in the Heidelberg Catechism the law is placed in the section on Gratitude (Reformed contextual), but it also serves a useful purpose at times to be read during the time of confession of sins to remind us of our shortcomings (counter-cultural).

*The Nairobi Statement was prepared by the Department for Theology and Studies of the Lutheran World Federation (see Lift Up Your Hearts website worship.ca/). For a seven-minute video on the Nairobi Statement, suitable for congregational viewing, see also website worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/an-open-and-discerning-approach-to-culture.

Bert Witvoet experiences worship in art, liturgical dance, architecture, hymns and praise songs, a variety of instruments, Word and sacrament, congregational prayer, personal testimony and the crying of a child or a child-like person (Thank you, Emily Wierenga, CC July 22, 2013). He and Alice live in St. Catharines, Ont.



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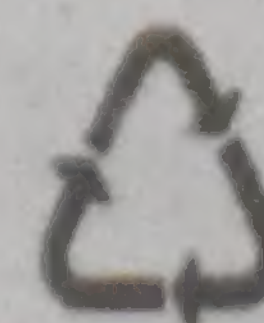
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Editorials

Child of the kingdom



Sara Gerritsma DeMoor

When I was a child, I had a few recurring nightmares. I think I was about six or seven years old when they started, and they repeated regularly, so often that I can still vividly remember them. The theme was always the same: my parents died, or were in danger of dying, when they were away from home.

To this day, a snippet of one nightmare in particular stands out. My mom was driving home late at night from a meeting, in our big blue cube van. She got lost in a jungle (it's a dream, it doesn't have to make sense!), and the van ended up hanging off a cliff, perched precariously on its front tires. My mom was clinging to the front seat, crawling up to escape through the driver's side window, when her purse fell off her shoulder and landed on the back doors. Mom, always paranoid about losing her purse (it was actually stolen once), let go of the front seat to crawl down to retrieve it, throwing the van off balance. It rolled off the edge and, with my dear mother inside, plunged into an alligator-filled canyon below!

A psychologist or dream interpreter would probably have lots to work with in analyzing these dreams, but I have my own interpretation. In my child's mind, I do remember being afraid that my parents would not return from their evenings away, and in my child's mind they were always at meetings. One of them was always (seemingly) on the board or education committee at our local Christian school, on council or worship committee at our CRC church, attending meetings as the chair of the board of the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC), and more. All wonderful and meaningful and important "Kingdom causes," and to this day I admire my parents for their dedication to these causes and their example of faithfulness and commitment to the work of God's Kingdom.

But I have also had conversations with friends of mine whose parents were similarly committed, and at times we have lamented the fact that as children we sometimes felt like "the Kingdom" work was more important to our parents than spending time with us.

A Freudian slip?

So perhaps I shouldn't have been so surprised by something I said during a conversation with my husband, Justin, about six months after our first child, Noah, was born. Our elder had asked me to consider letting my name stand for selection as an elder in our church, and my husband and I were discussing

whether or not this was something I could or should commit to during this season of our family's life. I am the type of person who says "yes" too quickly, and I often end up feeling over-committed and anxious. Even though I am on maternity leave from my paid employment for one year, I have remained an active participant on a number of boards and church committees, and I wasn't sure I could fit in another set of meetings without being constantly stressed out when I return to work part-time. Being on council would require evening meetings on the same weeknight as meetings for Justin's work, and we would regularly need a babysitter for Noah.

One night we were cleaning up after dinner and discussing all these factors. With my own childhood fears in mind, I heard myself utter the following as I put a plate in the dishwasher: "The last thing I want is for Noah to grow up feeling like 'the Kingdom' is more important to us than he is." It took a second for that to sink in, as it dawned on me what I had just said. I looked up at Justin. He was staring at me. Nearly in unison we each said, "Or is it?"

My statement could be critiqued for a number of reasons, theological and practical (and it was not my proudest moment!), but as we unpacked it further, Justin and I agreed that it was certainly not the last thing we wanted for Noah. What we want to model and teach Noah is this: that we believe that God created a good but now fallen world, and that as followers of the crucified and resurrected Christ we try to be vessels of God's grace, peace, and re-creation on this earth until Jesus – who has already accomplished the world's redemption – returns.

Part of God's Kingdom

So no, it is not true that "the last thing I want is for Noah to grow up feeling like 'the Kingdom' is more important to us than he is." For one thing, I hope Noah grows up knowing in the core of his being that "the Kingdom" is not something separate from him and his life. In light of current trends of "helicopter" parenting and "child-centred" parenting philosophies that place the child at the centre of family life and family decisions, it is not surprising that my initial impulse was to fear that Noah might feel neglected by my commitment to other causes. But we really want Noah to know that his primary identity is not being the "most important person" in his parents' lives (or any other of the competing identity-shapers today), but as a child of God. He has been uniquely shaped and gifted by his Creator, "for we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10). Noah, and our role as his parents, are just as much part of God's Kingdom as that church committee or neighbourhood watch meeting. There should be no dichotomy there, no feeling that our kingdom calling is in any way competing with our attention for and love of our family, because family is an integral part of it!

Perhaps it shouldn't be surprising that, despite my childhood nightmares, I am grateful that my parents exemplified a sense of sacrifice and commitment to the important, practical working out of Christ's redemption in all areas of life when I was a kid. After all, according to the recent National Study of Youth and Religion (in the U.S.), "parents matter most in shaping the religious lives of their children" (Almost Christian by Kenda Creasy Dean, 112).

In the end, for many reasons, I said no to being on council right now, but I accepted another leadership role at our church, a role that involves fewer evening meetings while Noah is so young. But I am sure that as Noah gets older, he will have memories of his parents being busy with church meetings, school committees and community action groups. I just hope that he will look back, like I do, and be a little bit grateful – but that he is spared the nightmares.

Sara is currently enjoying the last month of her one-year maternity leave, and looks forward to returning to part-time employment as a campus chaplain at the Christian Reformed Campus Ministry at the University of Toronto in the fall. When she has time, Sara enjoys cooking, reading, and breathing deeply.

The role of culture in worship



Bert Witvoet

I was part of a discussion that focused on the kind of worship people prefer. The younger members of the group favoured strongly rhythmic, repetitive, personal and rhapsodic praise songs that take a hold of you and carry

you along. They made the comment that young people are in touch with contemporary culture and want worship that connects with that culture.

Half a year later I was talking with an older brother in the faith who joined the Eastern Orthodox Church in later years. He expressed displeasure with the worship style in our church because, he said, the informal tone throughout and the sometimes fast and loud music cater too much to young people. I knew that he had joined an Orthodox Church with its ritualistic and formal worship style and so anticipated his lack of comfort.



Every style of liturgy has been culturally adapted to a certain time and place.

I empathized with him seeing what his preferences are. But I took exception to what he said when he claimed that his church was the true apostolic church and that its liturgies are purely based on Scripture and uncontaminated by human invention. I told him that there was no liturgy in any church in the world that had not experienced a cultural adaptation to a certain time. No matter where and how we worship, human beings have given shape to the worship forms at some time. He told me that no team of horses could pull him away from the conviction that his church's worship was of divine origin. I found his position foolhardy, even though I respect his desire to embrace an ancient and formal kind of worship style that includes iconography.

When I hear young people say that they are in touch with contemporary culture, I respond by reminding them that they need to qualify their claim. They may be in touch with contemporary pop culture, and then only with one or two streams of it, but older believers like me are in touch with other aspects of contemporary culture: I am thinking of the political culture, educational theories, social issues, economic structures, art and literature, world views that influence people's choices. In other words, the claim that our young people are more in touch with today's culture and are more "with it" than we older folks deserves to be challenged.

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Canada

News

Nigeria: It's 'open season' on Christians

KANO, Nigeria (CCO/CWN) — Two recent explosions in Kano, a city of 3.4 million in northern Nigeria, killed at least 53 people. The terrorist group Boko Haram claimed responsibility, and one of the explosions was deliberately set at a Pentecostal church to coincide with its Sunday service.

Even more horrific, 16 Christians in Biu, a city of 175,000 in northeastern Nigeria, "were handcuffed and burnt to death by members of the Boko Haram sect within the precinct of a church," reported the Lagos-based *Vanguard*.

"We are sincerely saddened by the latest development, especially coming at a time when the committee set up by the federal government to ensure peace in the north has assured the nation that it is on top of the situation," said Roman Catholic Archbishop Alfred Adewale Martins after the attacks. "We



Pastor Oritsejafor asked the U.S. to acknowledge that Boko Haram is a terrorist organization.

are tired of speaking on the state of insecurity in the nation."

A Protestant pastor and president of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Ayo Oritsejafor, said Boko Haram is now targeting schools as well as churches. While in Washington recently, Pastor Oritsejafor told the National Press Club, "It is open season on Nigeria's Christians." Oritsejafor urged the U.S. State Department to designate Boko Haram as a foreign terrorist organization.

Emmanuel Ogebe, a human rights attorney, said that "[State Dept. officials] seem to indicate there are good parts of Boko Haram and bad parts of Boko Haram, so they don't want to alienate the good parts," the American evangelical paper *World* reported. "It's hard to see the good in a group going to schools and killing kids." ➤

Controversial Gardasil vaccine causing more controversy

Marian Van Til, with files from LSN, CDC, Wikipedia, HormonesMatter.com

WHITEHOUSE STATION, NJ — Gardasil is a vaccine developed by Merck Pharmaceuticals to combat a virus family (human papillomavirus or HPV) that causes an estimated 70 percent of cervical cancers and 90 percent of genital warts. The drug was first approved in the U.S. and Canada in 2006. The target audience was nine to 26-year-old girls, but soon boys as well.

Gardasil was almost immediately controversial because Merck lobbied American state legislatures to make the vaccine mandatory for preteen girls as a requirement for school attendance. In Canada, the year the drug came out, the federal government began using \$300 million over three years to administer the vaccine in schools, and in 2007 the provincial governments targeted Grade 8 children for the vaccine.

As in the U.S., many Canadian parents objected from moral and personal privacy standpoints. Critics said that making Gardasil compulsory both assumed that preteens and teenagers were sexually active and encouraged that activity. Another major concern was the lack of long-term data on the safety of the drug.

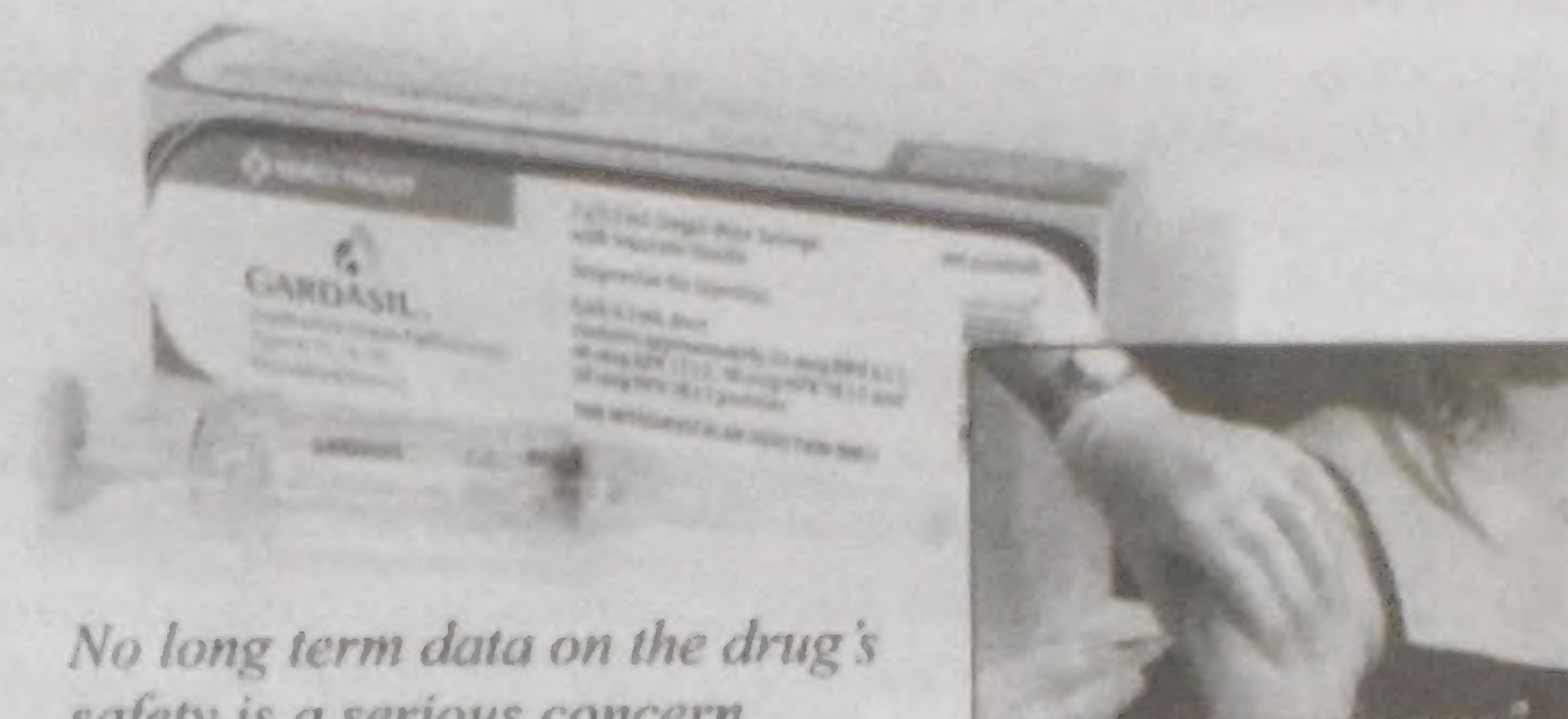
That safety concern was well-placed. In 2008 a 14-year-old Quebec girl died after receiving two doses of the vaccine at her public school. After the first dose the girl vomited, became incoherent and temporarily unable to speak or walk. She was hospitalized but told she had a severe migraine, and was sent home. She received a second dose a month later, for reasons unknown. Two weeks later she was dead. Her parents sued Merck, three doctors and a clinic. In the U.S., 28 deaths of young people have now been associated with Gardasil.

As of September 30, 2009, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) had received 603 reports of "adverse events" following vaccination with Gardasil, including the Quebec girl's death.

Will never bear children

It is Gardasil's safety — or lack thereof — that has put it back in the news. The *British Medical Journal* (BMJ) has just reported that an otherwise healthy 16-year-old Australian girl lost all ovarian function and went into menopause after being injected with Gardasil. The non-function of her ovaries and onset of menopause are irreversible.

The girl's doctor, Deirdre Little, noted that Merck



No long term data on the drug's safety is a serious concern.

"has no supporting information on the effects of the vaccine on ovaries." She asserts that the company "had either done no safety testing on Gardasil in relation to its effects on women's reproductive systems, or had suppressed the information." She found records of the drug's effect on rat testes, but none on rat ovaries, much less human ovaries.

Steven Mosher of the Population Research Institute said, reacting to the Australian girl's plight, "Tens of millions of young girls have received the Gardasil vaccine since its approval . . . six years ago. If even a tiny fraction of them have experienced infertility as a result, then these girl children have been denied a very fundamental right, that is, the right to decide how many children they want to have. . . . The Australian girl lost an integral part of her womanhood, while still but a child. Women deserve better." ➤

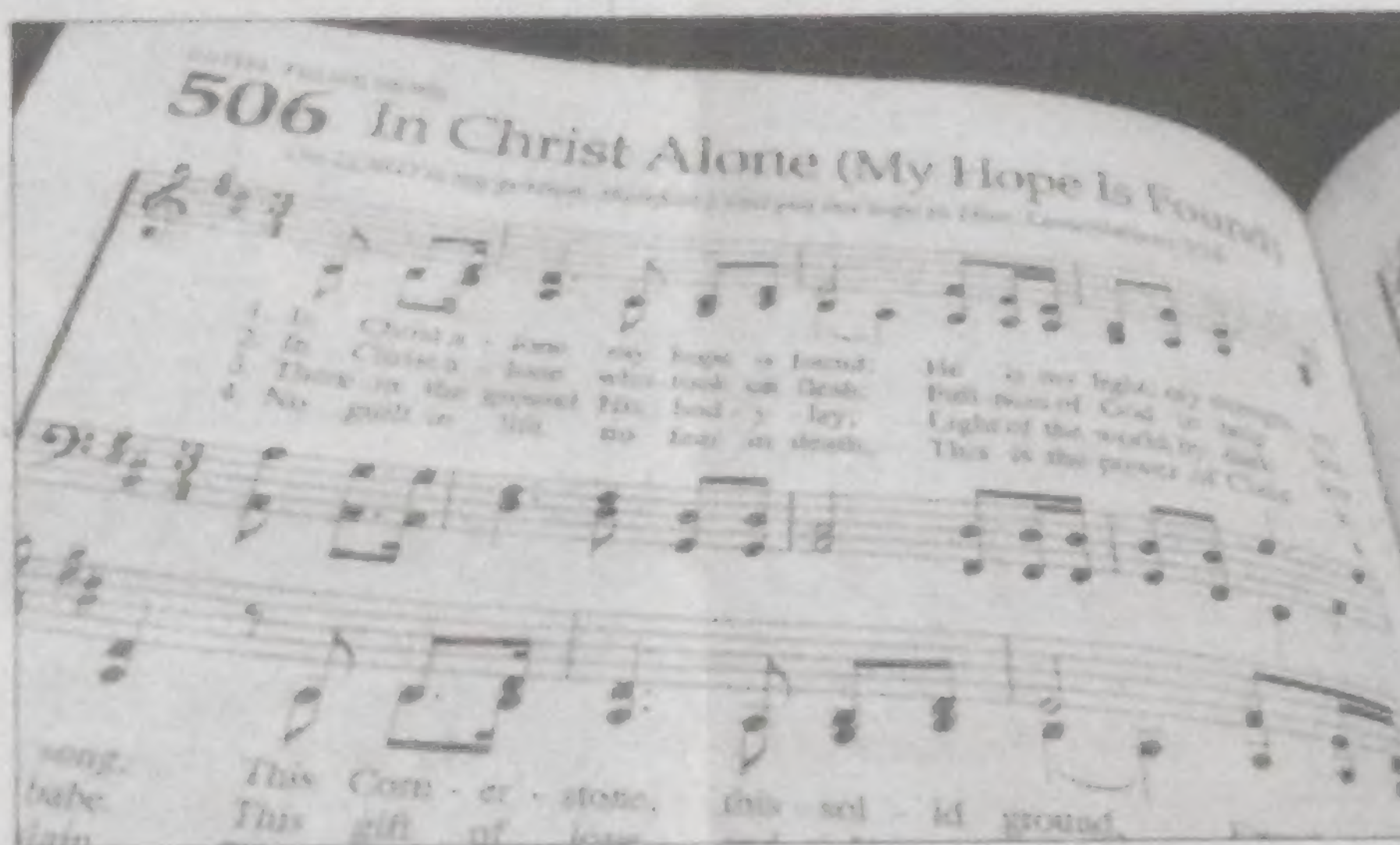
U.S.: Presbyterian hymnal compilers reject *In Christ Alone* over 'wrath of God'

Marian Van Til, with files from *The Tennessean*, *Ethika*, *Politika*, CT, FT

LOUISVILLE, Kentucky — The Nashville-based paper *The Tennessean* first reported the story: The committee that is compiling a hymnal for the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (PCUSA) dropped the immensely popular modern hymn "In Christ Alone" because the song's authors refused to change a phrase about the wrath of God.

There's a line among the four-stanza hymn's original lyrics by Stuart Townend (tune by Keith Getty) that says, *Till on that cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied*. The majority of the Presbyterian Committee on Congregational Song had a theological problem with that. So they devised a substitutionary phrase: *Till on that cross, as Jesus died, the love of God was magnified*. They then contacted Townend and Getty for permission to use that substitution. (Getty lives in Nashville.) The authors said no. So the committee voted six to nine to drop the song.

When word of the Presbyterians' action got out it created a firestorm of protest among Christians who know the song, so much so that the committee chair backed off from the real reason the hymn was not included. Mary Louise Bringle, speaking for the committee, began claiming that the word "satisfied," not the word "wrath," was the real reason for the decision. She told *Christianity Today*, "People think that we've taken the wrath of God out of the



Hymnal committee wanted to replace "wrath of God was satisfied" with "love of God was magnified."

hymnal," Bringle said. "That's not the case. It's all over the hymnal. The issue was the word 'satisfied.'"

The real issue

First Things (FT), an independent journal published by The Institute on Religion and Public Life, pointed out Bringle's doubletalk. "In an earlier, more unguarded account she wrote for the *Christian Century*, Bringle admits that wrath was the real issue," wrote FT's Matthew Schmitz.

Bringle had told *Christian Century*: "Arguments on the other side pointed out that a hymnal does not simply collect

diverse views, but also selects to emphasize some over others as part of its mission to form the faith of coming generations; it would do a disservice to this educational mission, the argument ran, to perpetuate by way of a new (second) text the view that the cross is primarily about God's need to assuage God's anger. The final vote was six in favour of inclusion and nine against, giving the requisite two-thirds majority (which we required of all our decisions) to the no votes. The song has been removed from our contents list, with deep regret over losing its otherwise poignant and powerful witness."

Schmitz responded in *First Things*, "Wrath and satisfaction shouldn't be severed in the way Bringle attempts — this isn't an either/or. Yet by Bringle's own account, it was above all discomfort with the idea of an angry God that led the committee to nix 'In Christ Alone.'" He also noted the irony of the fact that the hymn's original phrasing "better represents the Presbyterian Church USA's historic beliefs" — as stated in the Westminster Confession — "than do objections raised by the committee members."

A *First Things* online reader summed up the attitudes of many. "PCUSA long ago abandoned its basis of beliefs found in the Book of Confessions. Not surprising whatsoever." The PCUSA is the mainline Presbyterian Church in the U.S. Though rapidly shrinking, it still has some 10,000 congregations and 1.9 million members. ➤

News

Nova Scotia CRC youths minister to homeless in Halifax

Chris Meehan

HALIFAX, NS (CRCNA) – Shailey Letford remembers the homeless man in downtown Halifax who put a hand on her shoulder, calling her “a little Jesus.” She had simply been listening to him – his name was Beaver – tell his story. The experience hit her in unexpected ways.

“He said, ‘You will not be forgotten.’ Funny, God sent me there . . . not only to help others, but God intended to change me, too, and I know one thing’s for sure . . . that I am different because of the experience,” she says.

Letford was part of the 15-member Halifax Mission Trip 2013, a group of young people and adults who ministered for eight days last month among the homeless in Halifax. Ranging in age from 12 to 51, the team came from a Christian Reformed Church congregation in P.E.I., one in New Brunswick and three in Nova Scotia. “We set out to bring a little bit of hope by helping the hungry, hurting and hopeless of Halifax,” said Pastor Albert Huizing, youth pastor for the CRC in Charlottetown, P.E.I.

Before leaving, the group held a food drive and brought 30 bags of groceries to donate to the Parker Street Food Bank, the Halifax food bank where they served. They arrived on a Friday and early the next day started making desserts that they handed out to more than 200 homeless people who came to the food bank on Sunday evening.

“One-on-one serving and food always generates a lot of discussion and is a great introduction to our week, because many of those we speak with, we see in other missions, projects, drop-ins and ministries throughout Halifax the rest of the week,” said Huizing.

Servicelink, the office that helps to recruit and train volunteers for the Christian Reformed Church, helped to coordinate the trip. Members of the short-term mission team worked at the food bank on Monday, Wednesday and Friday that week and also helped to set up for the opening of a second food bank in a nearby town.

On Tuesday and Thursday, said Huizing, they split up into teams and were involved in ministry at a heroin treatment facility, a youth drop-in center and a soup kitchen. They also did maintenance work at All Nations CRC, where they were staying. In addition, said Huizing, members of the team made sure to do “their more important jobs of chatting, playing games and serving those that lived on the streets of Halifax.”

Serving other ‘a high’

Team members were especially struck by interacting with people on the streets. There was Gnosh,



One quarter of the homeless population in Halifax is youth.



Many churches will participate this winter in Halifax's Out of the Cold program.

a Sudanese refugee who is a Christian and “has been through many bad things”; Tony, who was living out of his car, showering in public fountains and had no job; and Chris “who just seemed like normal father trying to provide for his family.”

“My high for the week was just getting to serve all these people, and knowing that I was helping people,” said one group member.

Elna Siebring, All Nations CRC’s Community coordinator, said, “These young men and women had conversations with homeless people, brought food for the food bank, made desserts for the homeless, shared food with those who hungered, scrubbed floors, painted walls, cleaned toilets, sorted food and other tasks.” Besides all of the work they did, they spoke and prayed with honesty. “It was very humbling to listen to their thoughts and reflections at devotions.”

Becoming more aware of “the invisible” people on the streets and of the work that Christians in Halifax are doing to meet their needs are lessons Lia Alkema, the classis youth ministry co-ordinator for Classis Eastern Canada, has brought home with her. This was her first short-term missions trip. There were definitely times when I was stretched and way-out of my comfort zone and even afraid,” she said. “The daily debriefing and prayer time we had were very important to process those feelings.” Alkema was also “so impressed with each of the youth that were part of the team and so glad to get to know them better.”

CRC’s publishing arm meets its demise

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA)

– In June the synod of the Christian Reformed Church dissolved the board of directors of the financially struggling Faith Alive, formerly known as the CRC Publications. What some church members may not have realized is that that synodical decision marked the death of the publishing arm of the CRCNA. The CRC will, however, continue to make Faith Alive materials available.

Current and former employees of Faith Alive Christian Resources gathered on August 7 to mark the passing of the CRC’s long-time publishing agency. But they also acknowledged the beginning of the CRC’s new faith-formation initiatives.

“There is the loss of what has ended and yet we have thanksgiving for what God has been able to accomplish through us. It has been a great run, a blessed journey,” said Rev. Leonard Vander Zee, former editor-in-chief of Faith Alive. But, he said, he and others are also looking ahead “to a new era of faith formation under new guidance.”

In fact, on the same day as the Faith Alive gathering the CRC released “Dwell Play,” the first preschool curriculum that the denomination has developed in eight years. Packaged in a sturdy, colorful box, Dwell Play “leads you and the four- and five-year-olds in your Sunday school, home school, preschool or daycare on a joyful discovery of God’s love,” says a press release.

Dwell Play joins four other Dwell curricula, each focusing on the faith formation of particular age groups. Dwell Play, said Vander Zee, is full of “brilliant art” and accessible stories and is an example of a long line of Faith Alive materials that have filled the needs of churches over the years.

‘A rough and good ride’

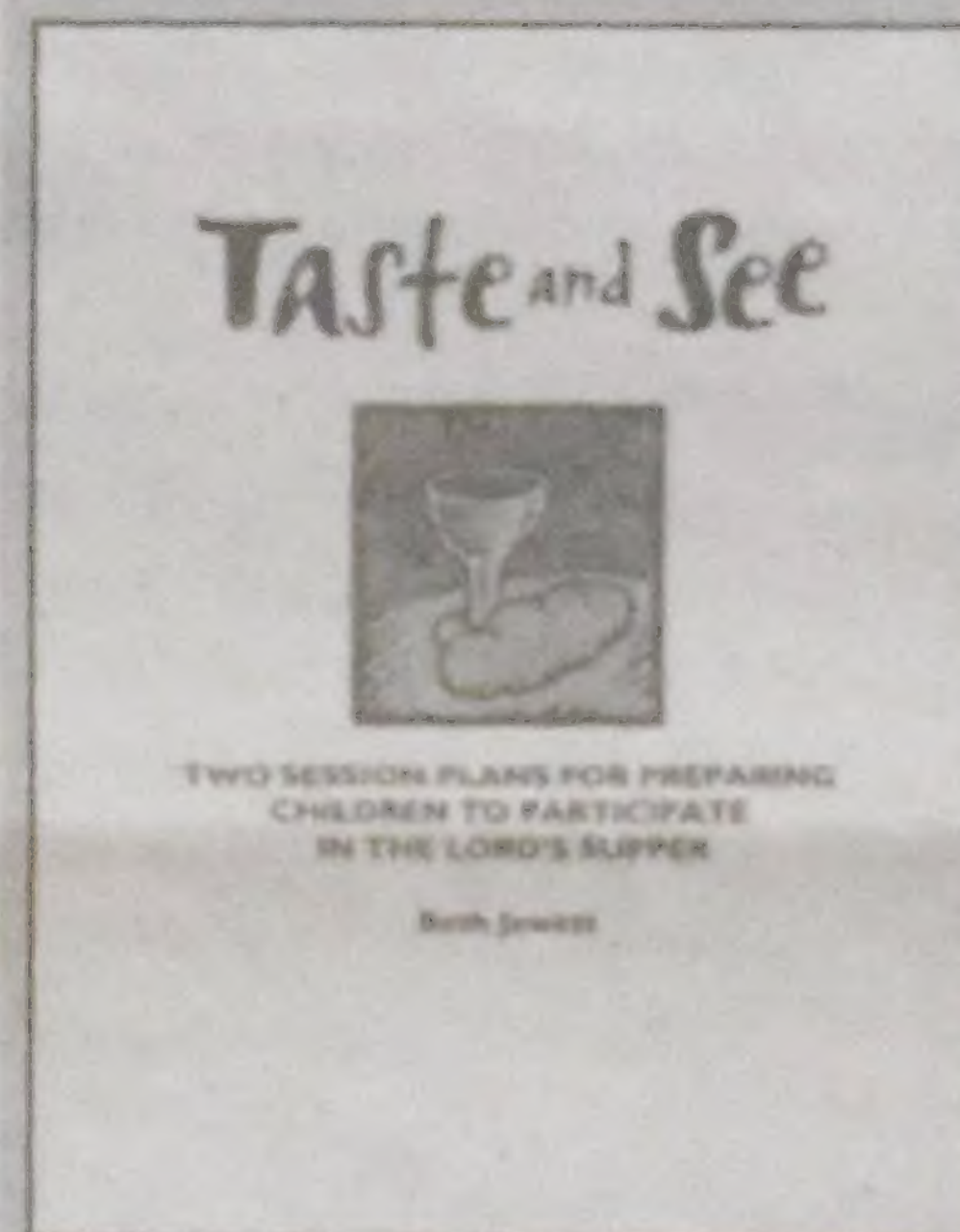
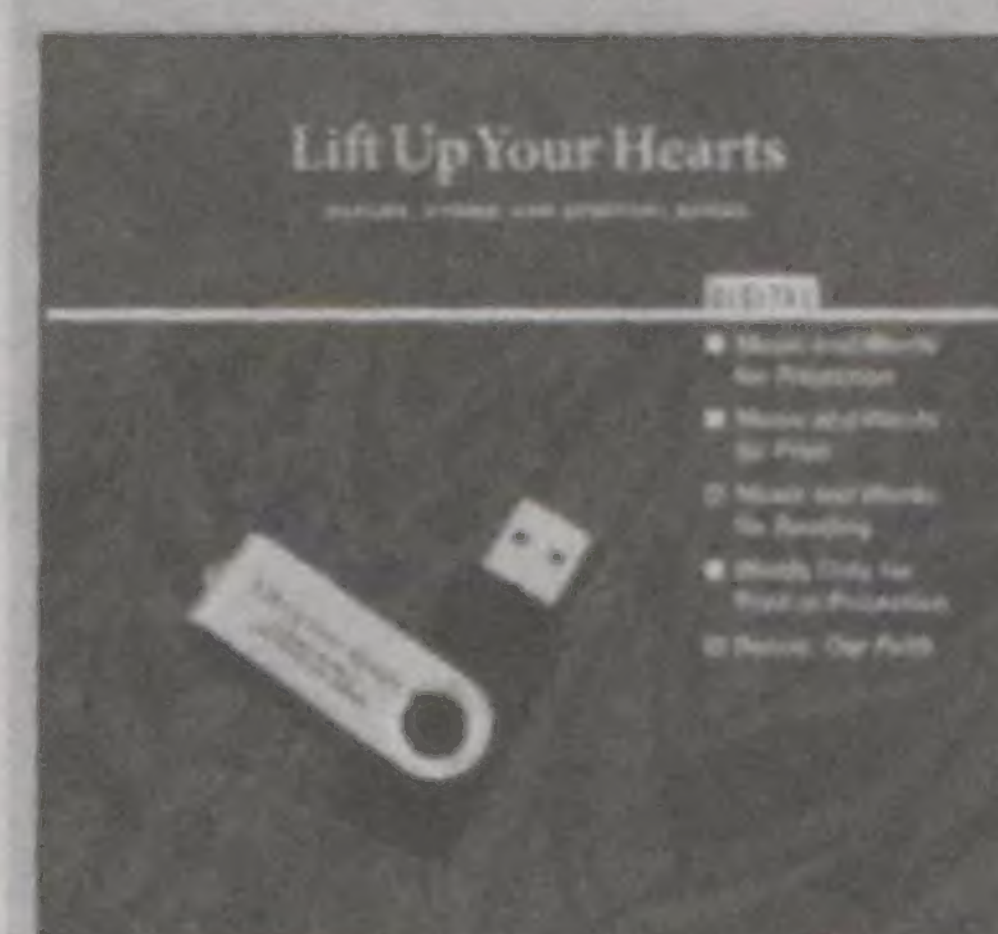
Vander Zee and others reflected on those materials and on their time working together. Rev. Andy Kuyvenhoven,

former editor of *The Banner*, said he worked at Faith Alive in the 1970s and 1980s, a time of great technological transition, a period in which the printing process changed more in a few years than it had in the previous 500 years. He also recalled when they drew criticism for using a dog in promotions.

“It was a rough and a good ride,” said Kuyvenhoven, who also served as director of Faith Alive’s educational ministries. “I’m very thankful for those who worked with me over the years, and thankful for what God has done.”

Gary Mulder, a former director of CRC Publications/Faith Alive, reminisced how the publishing ministry produced a range of materials, from Bible studies to Sunday school courses, that at one time were in almost every congregation in the CRC. He said that the transitions the ministry has gone through are “very painful.” But, he said, it is important to note that Faith Alive’s legacy “is changing lives and that will go on for many, many years.”

Vander Zee said Faith Alive, like many ministries, was caught in a storm of change that includes a drop in denominational loyalty, an aging church population and a transformation in how families spend their time and resources and how they access information.



Columns

Ambassador

Thomas Wolthuis



On Victoria Day I was in Edmonton. With an opening in my schedule, someone suggested that I go out to Elk Island Park for a walk. I bought bug repellent, water and high SPF lip balm. At the Visitor Centre I asked the guide about the best route to walk. He suggested a 10 kilometre trail around Shirley Lake (Shirley, the name of my mother-in-law and sister).

I started walking the trail and wondered "why?" The scenery was a forest. Every once in a while I would see a little water, but not any animals more than a squirrel. The path was easy to follow. It seemed like just exercise, but I wanted more than that. I realized I was taking a walk without a guide.

Reading Scripture

That could describe how many people feel when they read Scripture. They prepare to do it. They have some instructions. They have the reading skills, but they start and then wonder "why?" As they continue reading, they think, "Well, maybe I will get something out of this. Maybe I can at least say I have done it." Many people read Scripture without a guide.

I didn't know what to look for on my

Tour guides available

walk. I would see something to avoid, like a puddle to walk around or the large amount of scat on the trail. Some people read Scripture and consider how not to act, or decide what to avoid. But that doesn't seem to be enough – a negative reading. You can avoid those problems in other ways. I didn't need to walk the trail to know that avoiding mud and dung makes sense.

Adventure

I wanted an adventure, a positive experience, an encounter. So I kept walking, just like many people keep reading. I considered whether this was a joke Canadians play on Americans like myself who move to Canada. "Go for a walk out in the woods" – setting us up to be mosquito bait. But those who know the woods know what to look for. If they were with me, they would be able to point out things I missed – all the types of trees, the type of scat, where to look for animals, the meaning in history of this forest, who once lived here, why the National Park came into existence, how it has value. ... A learned person and guide would have helped me. The same thing is true when it comes to reading Scripture. There are many things that a guide can point out.



We walk, and read Scripture, alone too much.

A guide

I talked to a guide at the beginning of my walk, but he didn't know me. His advice was very general. A guide is most helpful if he or she not only knows the trail and what to point out, but also knows you and your background.

Your community, including your pastor, is good place to look for a guide to Scripture. Find someone with knowledge and experience, but not always someone who thinks just like you.

I often want to walk by myself. Going by myself allows me to set my own pace, to have reflections and to do what I want to do; but it also has limitations. There is no one with whom to share the experience. In two groups I saw children pointing out different things, looking in different ways, and asking

questions. I would have enjoyed taking such a walk with my children or grandchildren. We read Scripture alone too much.

Unadventurous

Overall my walk was unadventurous. I did not see any animals, other than one bunny, a squirrel, a few ducks and birds. I did not see any bison, elk, beavers, fox, or coyote – which is maybe good. On the plus side, I did not get lost. I did not turn an ankle. It was a beautiful day for a good walk – partly cloudy skies, temperature around 20 and not enough rain to cause any difficulty.

Reading Scripture will not always bring a startling moment. It is good exercise. It opens us up to the possibility of new experiences. In the adventures and in the average, God is there. God was there in the magnificence of the forest, in the fallen trees and new growth, the life cycle of the ponds and lakes, the beauty of the sun, the variety of the day. ... It was a not life-changing encounter. It was a good walk, but it would have been better if there had been tour guides available. >

Rev. Tom Wolthuis (TWolthuis@icscanada.edu) shares the position of President of the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Ont. with his wife Dawn.

Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch



"So I suppose you're going to put those pictures in *Christian Courier*." So remarked a friend who saw photos of Betsey and me making haystacks. Some years

ago, I wrote about scything oat hay and piling it up in the yard for winter feed. The hard work then was the scything, an activity at which I am a rank amateur.

This year we used a tractor and mower to do the cutting. I bought a used sickle-bar mower last year and – after some "learning experiences" – used it to cut one of my tiny pastures (1/4 acre?) that was shoulder high in timothy. Then I cut a tiny part of a neighbour's field that was not worth the effort of mowing with his swather. Finally, I mowed the "outside round" of our 15+ acre hayfield.

I borrowed a hay rake and raked all the hay to help it dry and to put it in windrows. After that I walked the windrows and put them together into small piles for ease in picking them up with a pick-up truck. This work and picking up the loose hay was done with human arms and a hay fork.

There are two explanations for why we chose to make haystacks of loose hay: 1) we didn't have a baler and everyone else seemed too busy to do our small amounts; 2) we were inspired.

Hand-pitched haystacks



"It looks glorious but it wasn't always fun either," as one friend says.

The inspiration came from two places. First, as a devoted reader of Gene Logsdon's blog, *The Contrary Farmer*, I wanted to see if I could make haystacks the way he did. Second, *National Geographic* magazine recently published an article about farming in Transylvania that showed people making haystacks by hand as a necessity.

Gene Logsdon's plan for making haystacks is simple: put down pallets or brushwood to keep the hay from contact with the ground and then make a circle eight feet in diameter with five-foot fencing and fill it in. As the hay settles, add more and finally make a conical or rounded cap. As begin-

ners we hedged our bets and covered the finished haystack with a tarp.

We made three of these. Two we erected near the cow barn and another up the hill and way-to-heck-and-gone. This one we made in the shape of a pyramid and covered it with a tarp.

Before we were one-third the way around the 15 acre field we realized that we were out of wire and out of pallets. So we carted that hay down to the hay barn, which is mostly filled by our tenant-farmer's big round bales. I dumped load after load on the

floor of our barn until it was getting difficult to reach any higher. We didn't have one of those clam-shell, pulley-operated hay forks, so I just dumped the last number of loads outside the barn and waited for Betsey to come home from work.

After supper I sent her to stand on the round bales while I consolidated the loose hay. At a certain point I convinced her to try jumping (falling) onto the loose hay, an activity that should be required for all children in order to graduate from Grade 1. Our new Golden Retriever, Rufus, figured out how to climb up the stack and he helped pack the hay.

Finally, we had everything under the roof. We also had pain in every muscle in our bodies, it seemed. As my friend remarked, "It looks glorious but it wasn't always fun either." By morning the immensely-high (we thought) pile of loose hay had settled. Maybe we put enough in that barn to equal two round bales.

On the other hand, we will feed our cows with hay that we touched, lifted and packed. We did not buy a \$20,000 round baler. Our tractor is an ancient Massey 35. And we have more appreciation for people who work hard, day after day, with their hands, with their arms, with their bodies, for returns that people like ourselves wouldn't consider.

And best of all, we did it together and experienced as a luxury what may well be a calling: working as a pair, wife-and-husband. (And a yellow dog.) >

Curt Gesch is 64 years old and is glad he doesn't have to make 30 haystacks per year. (Betsey Gesch is much younger.)

Reviews

Simple, real and raw

The Northwoods Hymnal

Anna Visser

"I'm not a big fan of the l-y," Dordt College professor Luke Hawley tells his "Responding to Literature" class one morning. They've been reading *The Glass Menagerie*, and their assignment was to take note of unfamiliar words, which they are defining in class. Hawley, looking slightly dishevelled in a plaid button-down shirt, his hair unkempt and clutching a coffee mug, is laughing with

The Northwoods Hymnal
by Luke Hawley
River Otter Press, 2013
204 pp.

the class over strange words and definitions, and he's told them that he doesn't have much use for adverbs. It seems the l-y isn't quite straightforward enough for Hawley.

Plaid and slightly dishevelled is the norm for Hawley, and everything about his style is unhurried, laid back, simple. His office at Dordt houses a few pictures, a few books, a few notes for the novel he's writing. He plays acoustic guitar and the songs he writes are honest, quiet folk songs. He spent the semester commuting between his job that he loves in Sioux Center and his family – a wife and two kids – that he adores in St. Paul, Minnesota. And his book – a collection of short stories and hymns titled *The Northwoods Hymnal* – came out in February, and it's just as simple, just as real, just as honest as everything else about Luke Hawley.

According to Hawley, *The Northwoods Hymnal* began as his creative thesis in graduate school. He had originally planned on a novel, but while in school he found he loved

short stories – and the genre was well-suited to his lifestyle. He could write and edit a story while his kids were napping. The same is true of the hymns that accompany each story. As a creative exercise he began to try and communicate the core of a narrative through the shorter form and structure of song. It was a way to gain focus, and to glean more meaning from each story and hymn. "Plus," he says jokingly, "it's a great gimmick."

But the book is far from gimmicky. Each of Hawley's ten stories is about characters we all know. They're about death and memories, about love and loss, about couples and friends and about God. They are about Hank checking dead Mr. Galloway's pockets for cash and about Ethyl running naked from the sauna into the snow. They are a woman painting breast cancer, a man breaking the light to see the stars. These are real people living real lives and asking real questions. They're raw; they exist.

The hymns are just as raw. Each book provides the password for an online download of the hymns, which are as quiet and understated as the stories they accompany. Hawley, along with some friends, wrote both lyrics and music in four-part harmony. Only one story actually mentions its accompanying hymn; the rest simply tell the same core story in a different medium. The songs are not exact retellings; rather, they are parallel sister-stories. Story and song stand alone, but each reinforces the other, making Hawley's characters and words all the more beautiful.

And there's hardly an adverb in sight. It's Hawley's straightforward style that makes these characters so relatable, his simplicity that makes the stories so resonant. There's

The Tender Kind

Each of Luke Hawley's short stories has a parallel sister-story in hymn form.

sorrow that isn't depressing; there's darkness edged with light. They were quick to write and they are quick to read, but they are also deeply true and provoking. They're the kind of stories whose endings are both final and longing for more.

Hawley's writing is at once beautiful and comfortable, and the entire hymnal invites the reader into his unhurried, straightforward style. Hawley writes a book about real people and real life, but he also writes with and for real people – his family, his bandmates, and his readers. Of being published, he says, "That's what it's like: crazy. And an honour." He's aware that he leads something of a charmed life, and for that he's grateful. He humbly states in his acknowledgements: "And to anyone who might read these stories... I understand the limited nature of time and I appreciate that you took a sliver of your life and joined me in my fake one."

Anna Visser is currently a senior at Dordt College where she is studying English and music. She is from Ingersoll, Ont. Read more of Anna's thoughts and stories at avpencilledin.blogspot.ca.



Dealing with difference

Man of Steel reviewed

that people fear? Where do people with difference fit into society? Are Christians just as fearful of difference as everybody else? Do we embrace them and encourage them to use their unique gifts or do we remain suspicious of their difference? How are we to understand being different ourselves?

Clark's adoptive father Jonathan, played by a subdued Kevin Costner, is the voice of caution in this movie. After Clark saves some drowning children, Jonathan warns him that he needs to be more careful and reveals to Clark his true origin as an alien from Krypton. Clark's response is to ask "Should I have let them die?" Ironically, later in the film Clark is faced with the same choice when it comes to saving Jonathan's life.

Many superheroes are godlike, but more so than any superhero, Superman represents a Messiah figure. There are clear Christ parallels. Clark's Kryptonian father Jor-El, played by Russell Crowe, sends him to earth, and away from the doomed planet of Krypton, in the hopes that he will be the saviour of the Kryptonian people. *Man of Steel* also acknowledges Superman's similarities to Christ in some of its imagery. While wrestling with the decision to turn himself in to the authorities for the good of the people of earth, Clark has a conversation with a priest in a church and during this conversation an image of Christ in the church's stained glass window appears over his shoulder. Also his initial appearance to the public as Superman with cape and costume has visual echoes of Christ's transfiguration and ascension.

Ultimately criminals from Krypton, led by the domination-obsessed General Zod, force Clark into becoming Superman by threatening to destroy the earth if he doesn't come forward. When Clark does willingly come forward, his surrender is treated with suspicion and the humans in charge are all too willing to hand him over to Zod. It is only after this exchange that it is revealed that Zod is going to reshape earth causing all the humans to die so that the Kryptonian

race can live on in their place. It is in this situation that Clark as Superman is uniquely able to defend the earth from Zod and his posse. The fallout of their superhuman conflict, however, is barely addressed after the fact. One would think that Superman would be concerned at the potential loss of life in the collapsing buildings. Even after defeating Zod, Superman remains under suspicion to the point that a joke is made about the army attempting to keep him under surveillance.

Like the last Superman movie, *Superman Returns*, *Man of Steel* struggles somewhat under Superman's history as a character. Along with the insertion of angst, *Man of Steel* makes a few interesting choices. The most obvious of these is having love interest Lois Lane, played in a well-rounded, empowering way by Amy Adams, be able to determine Clark's true identity prior to his appearance as a reporter at the Daily Planet. Other than in the TV series *Smallville* this hasn't been done. It does make for an interesting situation where she becomes the keeper of his secret, rather than him feeling the need to keep his secret from her, but her insightfulness calls into question the credulity of everyone else.

Ultimately the film fails in its ability to believably portray Clark's inner struggle with his difference and uniqueness or to confront his feelings about his similarities to the other Kryptonians he encounters. Henry Cavill embodies the chiseled physique of the traditional Superman perfectly but is unable to make his inner conflict something that the audience can believe. Superman is ultimately not the character to embody the challenge of living as different.

Walter Miedema recently completed a Master of Library Science and is living in London, Ont. at least until some library is willing to hire him full time. He is curious about all aspects of culture and enjoys trying to think about them theologically. He blames Calvin Seminary for this.

*Man of Steel*

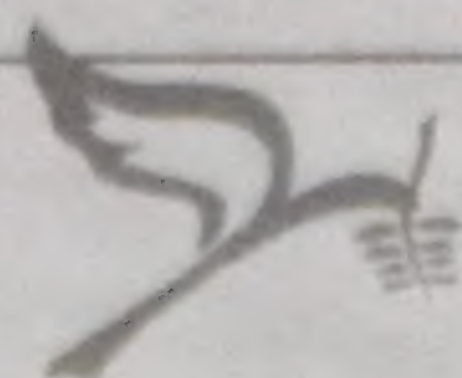
Directed by Zack Snyder
Warner Bros., 2013.

Walter Miedema

What does it feel like to be different? Is it something that gives us a sense of pride or something we fear because we find it humiliating or even dangerous to our being accepted in society? When *Man of Steel* begins, Clark Kent is not the shiny, clean cut reporter or the fresh faced Kansas farm boy that those in the know expect him to be. He's a scruffy, angst-ridden drifter, who is on the run from his unique abilities and the potential rejection and fear that they will cause to humans if they were ever to find out that he is different. Clark is not human, he is Kal-El, a super strong, super fast alien from the planet Krypton. Clark's discomfort with his special abilities is not the usual territory for a Superman story. Superheroes, like the X-Men from Marvel comics, have addressed the problem of difference many times, but Superman, who easily passes as human when not in tights, has traditionally been impervious to serious internal conflict. This is so true of the character of Superman that the angst in *Man of Steel* is a little difficult to swallow.

Much has been made of the darker tone present in this film. How can Superman, who has come to represent all that is good, clean and wholesome about America, be brooding? That's Batman's job. And why should Clark be uncomfortable using his unique abilities? What is it about difference

Features



Christian Courier is pleased to announce the winner of our **Fourth Annual Short Story Contest**. The finalists were judged by Angela Reitsma Bick, editor, Bert Witvoet, contributing editor and Cathy Smith, Features Editor. We congratulate Robert Gerryts, our winner, who will receive \$100 for his story, "And the anvil sang."

Reitsma Bick commented, "If you've made your own furniture or canned home-grown tomatoes, you know that the things we do by hand bring great pleasure. This short story illustrates that truth — the same one outlined in a small book called *Shop Class as Soulcraft* (Matthew Crawford). The lyrical prose and creative descriptions help to make this story sparkle." Witvoet added, "I like the formal but warm style, expressive diction and a positive theme without becoming moralistic." Smith noted the subtlety of the story: "It speaks gently and imaginatively about Christian values of work, family, community, duty and art. It is affirmative without being doctrinaire. There's a nice roundedness to this fable with a conclusion that both ends the story and hints at continued growth in the main character." Cathy Smith, Features Editor.

And the anvil sang

Robert Gerryts

Sweat was on his brow and worry was working its way into his thoughts. He gripped the hammer tighter, fighting the fatigue that was starting to eat at the last of his strength. It was late, but he knew that he needed to finish the sword, so he brought the hammer up and then down, up and then down again.

Sparks flew, smoke curled and the anvil sang.

He kept the rhythm. With each blow he quietly counted out the beat, and though the sword he was creating was true, his thoughts were of a different nature. He didn't understand why the king had chosen him to make the sword. He was too busy. He was too tired. He just wanted to crawl into bed with his wife and hold her close and drift off in dreams far from the smoke and heat of his smithy.

But instead he kept working. With each fall of the hammer he drove the sword towards perfection and completion. With each lift of the hammer he flipped the sword, sought out imperfection and slammed the hammer down at the place where he had seen it. The pace of his metal working counted off the minutes, and time went so quickly that the smith was unaware that the minutes had arranged themselves into tidy little one hour piles around his feet. He set the blade aside and turned to finish the guard, the grip and the pommel — finer work that he had started the night before. Lost in thought and work, once again time passed, the sword parts were joined, and then he had finished it. The sword was done.

And, although it was a work of great beauty, he did not feel this way, so he set it down on his workbench, still hot from the fire and the working of it, and he headed off unsatisfied to his house to sleep.

Outside a small wind blew, and as the smith slept, he missed the magic. In the smithy, on a window sill above the sword, sat a bouquet of flowers left by his wife to cheer him while he worked into the night. Through a crack in the window the small wind came, and a fragile petal from one of the flowers was carefully lifted by the wind and placed on the sword, and the sword consumed it with its heat.

Night passed, dew formed and the fickle fall morning, not knowing what outfit to wear, changed four times and suddenly found itself turned into dusk. As darkness came at the end of a long day's work, the smith, still feeling discouraged, began work on a second sword.

This time he felt he would get it right. He went through the process with renewed vigour, putting more care into his selection of metal, more thought into each step of the forging, more strength into each swing of the hammer, and more beauty and refinement into the design of the hilt. This sword took longer, but after the third night it was done, and it was a work of great joy. But again the smith frowned at his workmanship and with a shake of his head placed the sword aside, and headed back to his house to sleep.

Inside the smithy a mouse scurried, and as the smith slept, he missed the magic. Above the second sword on a high wooden rafter sat a doll left by his daughter to keep him company while he worked into the night. As the mouse scurried past the doll, a small hair from its tiny doll head fell and landed on the sword, and the sword consumed it with its heat.

The work of the next day was so greedy that it took all the time of the day and the night away, and the smith did not find a spare moment to start on a third sword. The day after that, the work of the day was an unforgiving tyrant, and the smith obeyed its every whim, not once finding the time or energy to start another sword.

But on the third night, the smith began working on his final sword. He selected even finer iron. He pounded and heated and folded and pounded and folded and heated. He used every ounce of strength his body would afford. As he watched the sword take form, he couldn't help but look at his hands, and a memory jumped from his hands to his mind of his own father, now long passed, who had the same hands, who had built and worked in this same smithy. He thought about how everything he had was a result of his father's courage, strength and determination. Many of the things that made him a good man sprang from that same source. And then, as his eyes watered at the memories, he blinked and he missed the magic. One small tear fell from his eyes and landed on the sword, and the sword consumed it with its heat.

The king was coming in the morning

Late in the night the sword was finished, and this time it is not about satisfaction, for he thought not about whether the sword would do, but that it would have to do. The king was coming in the morning. He headed to his house and he crawled into bed and laid his head down only to have it immediately

bounce off the pillow into early morning.

Arriving at the smithy, he looked at all three swords, and then, as he prepared to place one of them on red velvet to present to the king, he had a thought. The king could decide. He would present all three swords to the king, and he could choose in his wisdom the sword that he thought best suited his needs. So he neatly folded three pieces of the velvet cloth, and he polished all three swords and laid them out, and he prepared himself to meet the king.

The sun shone brilliantly and clouds stretched like royal banners across the sky. The day ached with beauty and with the thunder of hooves the king and his riders arrived.

The king dismounted and nodded a greeting to the smith and the smith knelt. The king, seeing the swords laid out, asked, "What is this? Why are there three swords?"

"Sire," replied the smith, "I struggled to create the perfect sword, so I present to you all three that you may choose the one that most suits you. Each sword is a result of my attempt to create a great work, and I humbly present them to you now."



The king, picking up each sword in turn, looked at them with great admiration. The forging was near perfect, the metalworking the work of a master, and the inlay on each hilt was inspired. The weight and balance of each blade was slightly different, but each felt right in his hand. He could not choose as he was drawn to each one with different feelings.

The smith, still kneeling, felt anxious. The silence of the king caused only one thought to run through his mind — that none of the swords was good enough, that he had failed.

The king turned back to the smith and said, "Rise, smith." As the smith stood, the king continued, "Smith, you please me. Each sword you have created is unique, and each has its own hint of magic." Picking up the first sword he announced to all, "I will call this the Sword of Love. When I hold this blade, I feel compassion, I feel peace, and I feel understanding. I will wear it every day that I hold court so that, as my people come to me seeking justice, I will remember to speak in love as I render my verdicts."

He placed the sword back on the velvet and picked up the second sword. "I will call this the Sword of Joy. When I hold this sword in my hand, I want to run as fast as I can and then jump with a song and land in a dance. I will wear this sword in dress for every festival and feast that I attend, so that its brilliance and spontaneity may be infectious and spread to all my people."

Picking up the third sword, the king held it for a long time before saying, "When I hold this sword, I feel my back straighten with pride and I feel all fear leaving my being. This blade is true and sharp and strong. When I hold it, I want to ride into battle with justice and mercy riding at my side. I will call this the Sword of Courage, and I will wear it every day that I do battle in defense of my kingdom."

The smith smiled, and his heart warmed as he saw his own swords through the eyes of the king. Later, as the king and his retainers rode off into the distance, the smith turned back to his smithy. The inspiration for another great sword already entering his thoughts, he started the work of the day.

Robert Gerryts is a husband, a father, a farmer, a teacher at Smithville Christian High School, a tech support person, and a writer.



Features

Our second place winner is Jacqueline DeJong who will receive a subscription to *Christian Courier* for her story "Peace on earth." "From a fairy-tale world," said Witvoet, "we move into a more contemporary, realistic situation. The struggle is real and the outcome lifts the celebration to a higher level that answers to her need to experience peace in the midst of marital breakdown, being a single mom, superficial Christmas events." Reitsma Bick offered this assessment: "It's a familiar scene: an Advent heavy with stress rather than joy. I found this story's realistic depiction of divorce's aftermath, with its understated humour and brilliant use of detail, touching." Smith liked the traditional story structure – a likable main character, a problem to solve and a satisfying conclusion. *Cathy Smith, Features Editor*

Peace on earth

Jacqueline DeJong

Ellen hung up the phone and gave an exasperated sigh. Just what she needed, she thought. As if she didn't have enough things to worry about. Now her sister-in-law had just phoned to tell her that this year the gifts for the family's gift exchange had to be around \$25, and, this was the kicker, they had to be homemade.

Ellen shoved a few books off the lazy-boy chair and sank down into it with a tired sigh. This year's get-together was going to be a real challenge. Last year, she hadn't gone, since Rob had simply picked up the kids, and she had stayed home and tried unsuccessfully not to hate her ex for what he'd put her and the kids through. Now, this year, her sister-in-law had invited her to come along with the kids since Rob would not be in town. While they both thought it, no doubt, neither voiced their disappointment that he'd leave his kids at this time just so that he could go to a fancy resort with his new love.

Ellen had enjoyed the get-togethers with Rob's family in the past, although she'd always felt a bit of an under-achiever with his highly creative and energetic family particularly his sisters. Now though, she worried about how awkward it would be, and whether she could come up with an excuse to miss it. However, when she remembered how upset the kids had been that their dad wouldn't be there during the holidays, she knew she'd have to be there for them, if nothing else. Besides, it was kind of Rob's family to try to still keep her in their family.

Ellen glanced around her living room trying to imagine what in the world she could possibly make as a gift. Cookies? No. Sue would be there and she was the world's best baker. Sewing or knitting something was also out of the question. She gave a laugh as she imagined her in-laws trying to figure out what the mangled bit of material or yarn was supposed to be. Besides, Debbie would have managed to create something amazing that would make anything she tried look pathetic. Hmm. . . . Nicely-printed recipe cards? She grinned wryly at the only meals she was a pro at. She doubted that recipes for tuna casserole or Hamburger Helper would go over well.

Discouraged by her lack of ideas, she decided to ignore the problem as she settled deeper into the easy-boy chair, and turned on the TV. There were a million things she should be doing now that the kids were finally sleeping. There was a stack of Christmas cards waiting to be written and sent out, the kitchen was a mess and her Bible study wasn't done. The list went on and on, and now a gift had to be homemade.

Superficial distractions

She flicked through the channels hoping something good was on that would distract her from all her worries. Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* – while she felt like a Scrooge herself, she wasn't in the mood for watching it. *It's a Wonderful Life* – nah, she really didn't need to see a wonderful "and they all lived happily ever after" ending. *Charlie Brown's Christmas* – their own pathetic tree looked a bit too much like that tree. *Sound of Music*? No, that one brought back too many memories of Rob. She finally settled on *Rita McNeil's Christmas Special*.

As the songs and scenery flashed in front of her, she wondered again on what in the world she could possibly



make. What if she just didn't make anything and brought gift cards instead? They wouldn't kick her out, would they? Why did creative people have to impose their ideals on others, anyway? Ellen wondered rather irreverently if the magi who'd brought the myrrh and frankincense had made them personally and whether they'd looked down with scorn on the guy who just showed up with plain 'ol gold.

The program finally ended and Ellen turned off the TV. She looked around at all the things she'd avoided, including working on a gift, and went to bed, hoping that somehow inspiration for something homemade would hit soon – and if the shoemaker's elves popped in and cleaned the place up, that would be a bonus!

During the next few days, as she got her kids off to school, worked at her job, or ran errands, Ellen worried off and on about both the family get-together and about the gift. The gift exchange was happening in just a few days and she still had not thought of a single thing, let alone shopped for the material, or whatever, to make it with, or spent the time making it.

One night after hearing the kids' prayers and tucking them into bed, and hoping like crazy they'd stay put, she suddenly thought of giving a coupon offering some service worth \$25. For a moment she felt elated – especially since it would save her the hassle of making something. But the feeling of elation soon left, as she couldn't imagine a single thing she could do for any of her in-laws. Babysitting was out since all their kids were past that age, housecleaning wouldn't work since most, if not all, had their own housecleaners. Ellen stifled a jealous wish of being able to afford someone to clean up her mess. Rats, this was driving her crazy. It was ridiculous to spend so much time worrying about a mere gift. At the back of her mind, a tiny voice asked why she was so worried about impressing her former in-laws. She knew that since Rob had left she'd been extremely sensitive about what other people thought, and constantly imagined that others judged her as inadequate. Again, the tiny voice spoke – asking her why she couldn't rest in how God saw her – a child of the King.

Desperately seeking peace

While doing devotions two nights before the family get-together, Ellen suddenly broke down. Here it was the season to dwell on the amazing gift of Immanuel, God

with us, and all she could do was obsess over a lousy gift. She turned to Isaiah 9 and read over the list of all the things that the prophet had said the Messiah would be: Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. That last phrase "Prince of Peace" caught her attention. Peace was something Ellen desperately wanted – peace to survive the sorrow of a broken marriage; peace to deal with the stress and busyness of being a single mom; peace to be a person who didn't worry about whether or not she had the same talents of others; peace to truly celebrate and worship the One who came from heaven to earth. She spent some time praying, asking for wisdom, strength and grace. She also asked forgiveness of her sharp and critical spirit.

When Ellen woke up the next morning, an idea suddenly came to her. Excitedly she rummaged through the miscellaneous mail items that had collected on the corner of her kitchen counter. Yes, there it was. No, it wasn't exactly homemade, but she had resolved the evening before that her gift would be a gift from her heart if not from her creativity.

Two nights later, Ellen went to bed with a grateful heart. Yes, there had been awkward moments as people referred to earlier celebrations when she'd been happily married.

And yes, she had suffered momentary pangs of jealousy when she saw the beautifully-crafted gifts that others had made. But the laughter, the food, the devotions, the time of carol-singing had all been wonderful. Her kids had been happy, and seemed to have temporarily forgotten their hurt at their father's absence during the holiday season.

As she drifted off to sleep, she smiled at the puzzle-moment, then genuine pleasure that her sister-in-law, Sue, had expressed at opening her card and reading of the offer to pick her up and spend an evening together volunteering at a local homeless shelter and for paying for some of the items to be distributed that day. Ellen thanked God for giving her peace that day – peace with the extended family, peace with her gift of being different, and peace at celebrating the incredible gift of the birth of Jesus – the true Prince of Peace. >

Jacqueline DeJong teaches at Calvin Christian School in Hamilton, Ont.



Features



"The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars."

The getaway experience: reconnecting with God through rest

Peter Frieswick

In a culture consumed by busyness, obsessed with work, time has become our preoccupation. "Time is money," we say. "There aren't enough hours in our day." We are tired, burnt out, and yet continue to drive ourselves forward to accomplish one more task, to tick off one more check box. Even during vacations we worry about jobs left briefly behind us, fret over work emails or phone calls. We aren't exactly sure what is so important about our busyness, but we feel its urgency and never quite seem to sluff it off long enough to enjoy ourselves.

Even as a branch of Reformed Christianity that has a tradition of enforcing Sabbath rest in ways younger generations cringe at, we still feel suspicious of leisure. When there are so many struggling families who need help, so many God-honouring duties that need completion, can there be anything holy about pulling away to spend time on yourself? And even if we can convince ourselves to rest, we do so with a twinge of guilt, perhaps even with a set of ready-made justifications. Taking a nap is okay, going on a cruise is not. A vacation is acceptable, but only if we work hard enough to earn it.

Why do we feel this way? I am not entirely sure, though I suspect it is because we are afraid. Afraid of being judged. Afraid we aren't holy enough. Afraid God won't provide for our needs. Afraid of being irresponsible. And yet, there is nothing intrinsically sinful about resting. Nor is there anything inherently immoral about going to a camp or resort.

Holidays and holy days

To the contrary, the notion of "getting away" for a while has biblical precedent. Former RZIM (Ravi Zacharias International Ministries) apologist Rev. Joe Boot believes, for instance, that modern Christian camps can trace their origin back to God's command to take a Sabbath rest. "The term 'holiday' literally means 'holy day.' The Christian camp/conference developed out of this notion that we can set aside holy time, holy days for rest, for rejoicing together before the Lord and for teaching and instruction," he said in an interview several years ago while speaking at a summer camp.

Similarly John Friesen, the director of the two largest Christian family camps and conference centres in Canada, believes that the Bible contains a "theology of place," a phrase he uses to describe how God uses particular places to instruct and encourage his children. For example, God reveals the Ten Commandments to Moses on a mountain, Elijah meets the whisper-voice of the Lord on "the mountain of God" and Jesus brings his three closest disciples up on a mountain to see him transfigured in glory. It appears that there is something significant about being on these mountains that was integral to God's message on each of these occasions.

In an interview at his home, Friesen encouraged people

to take time off and get away from their normal surroundings, because it allows them to be open to the Lord in ways they could not otherwise. Not surprisingly, for those living in urban settings, he advocates attending a Christian camp where they will be challenged in their faith over a concentrated period of time, far away from the usual distractions of the city.

But not all getaway experiences mean escaping the busy city. For his own personal retreats, Friesen goes to the city to watch people because he wants to see how God is at work amidst the hubbub and distraction. "It's no good pulling people up into the beautiful, natural environment of Muskoka if, when they get back to the city and the concrete jungle, God doesn't make sense anymore. For me, going to the city and connecting with God there is an affirmation that God is God over all," he said.

The important thing to remember is that wherever a person decides to go, he or she needs to invite God to be there and to consciously rest with him for a part of the time. In his book, *The Rest of God*, Mark Buchanan writes that when we go without rest, "we miss the rest of God: the rest he invites us to enter more fully so that we might know him more deeply."

Different getaways and their unique benefits

1. Residential Camp

For children, attending a camp may be one of the most transformational experiences of their lives. According to Mel Stevens, one of the founders of Christian Camping International Canada, a great majority of the leaders of missionary and evangelical organizations became Christians or made full-time commitments to the Lord at Christian camps. During the 55 years he's been in Christian camp ministry, Mel said, "We've seen people go all over the world in mission work and pastoral work. [Camp] has proven to be of tremendous value for many young people."

2. Family Camp

One of the major benefits of Christian family camp is that it offers a place for the whole family to be a family – without the ordinary stresses of jobs or errands. At the same time, family camps such as Fair Havens in Beaverton usually provide a number of structured, age-specific programs that allow parents to spend time in Bible study and by themselves while their children are participating in supervised activities.

Another benefit of Christian family camps is that they are safe, informal places for people to let their guard down. They offer nurturing communities, the opportunity for people to share their pain and joy with an understanding audience. They can also offer safety in other ways, as was related to me by a precocious 11-year-old camper several years ago: "We're all Christians here so you don't have to worry about anyone kidnapping you for money."

3. Nature Immersion

For centuries, Christians have referred to nature as a second "book" of revelation. If Scripture clearly reveals God's activity in human history, then creation reveals his "invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature" so that all people have no excuse for unbelief (Rom. 1:20). Being surrounded by God's natural creation can draw us closer to God and teach us to worship him humbly in ways that we may not learn elsewhere.

That has certainly been my own experience. On a recent trip to the States I hiked through groves of Californian redwoods. Rarely have I felt as much of an acute sense of humility as in that moment when I was dwarfed by immense trees and read these words from Ps. 29: "The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. . . . The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, 'Glory!'" (vs. 4-5, 9).

4. Spiritual Retreat

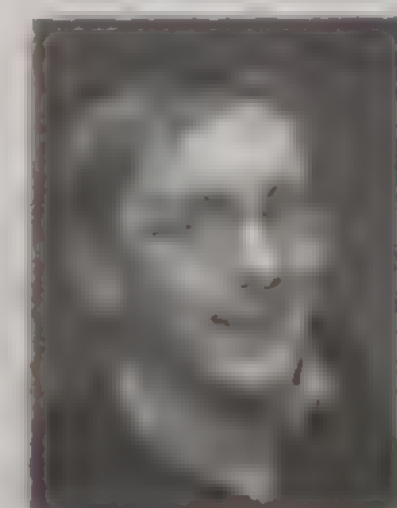
Whether informal or structured, for individuals or groups, lasting a day or a week, spiritual retreats offer much needed time for silence and reflection. Guided retreats usually include a place to stay, meals and a spiritual director who teaches participants how to connect more deeply with God. Although most are often run by Catholic and Anglican churches, guided retreats are intentionally non-denominational and focus on equipping Christians of many backgrounds with the necessary tools for intimately communicating with God.

While there are a number of excellent guided retreats, such as the Loyola House in Guelph which focuses on Ignatian prayer, people longing for peace don't need to go anywhere or follow a special liturgy to experience the benefits of a spiritual retreat. John Wesley's mother, for instance, threw her apron over her head when she wanted to be alone with God and her children learned not to pester her during those times.

Rest in God

Similarly, one retreat experience Friesen recommends is for people to sit and do nothing. Many people define their lives by "doing" and when they do nothing, they are forced to ask this question: does my sense of security, identity and self-worth come from what I do or from God? "I think it is telling if we can sit and do nothing, and I know a lot of people who can't," he said. ➤

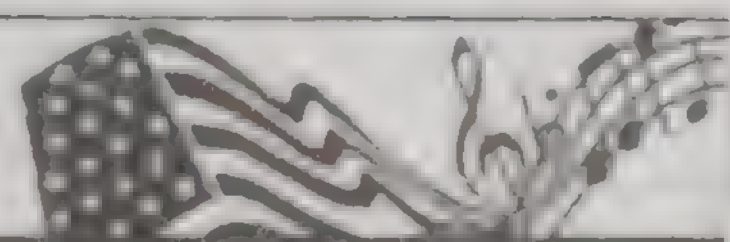
Peter Frieswick (peter.frieswick@gmail.com) recently completed a MA in English Creative Writing at the University of New Brunswick. He enjoys asking questions and sharing meals with friends.



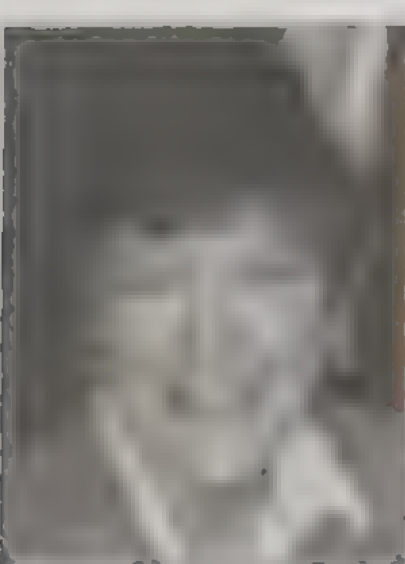
Features



From the 11th Province



Marian Van Til



Musician or not, you were created to feel the peculiar power of music, one of God's most delightful and potent gifts. And when fine music is wedded to a profound text, the power of that combination increases exponentially.

Love songs and national anthems are the secular music-text combinations that likely elicit the tightest grip on people's emotions (not that Christians are immune). But for us Christ-believers, music is at its most potent when it is an expression of our faith. It is no accident that the 150 Psalms are poetic songs. Or that God frequently urges us to praise him with song and musical instruments, and to "sing a new song to the Lord." In fact, that admonition occurs in six different psalms, once in Isaiah and twice in Revelation. So it is also no accident that music is immensely important to Christian worship.

Many churches have fought about what kind of music they should sing precisely because singing is so potentially powerful and can be such a profound expression of both our emotions and our faith – or not!

Personal tastes – love of a particular music style and distaste for other styles – play a large role in people's attitudes towards church music. But the personal tastes of pastors and music leaders should not be the final arbiter when music for corporate worship is chosen. Regardless of style, the music should be well-composed and the poetry should be well-written. And of course the poetic texts must be biblically, theologically sound.

Biblical soundness shouldn't be hard to determine for wise, Bible-literate Christians. But it's another matter whether a song, hymn or psalm consists of "good music" and "good poetry" (i.e., poetic form). I run into many Christians who say there is no such thing. "Good" is defined by one's own likes and dislikes. In saying so they are adopting some of the secular philosophy that the material world and "personal choice" are the only possible basis for our attitudes and actions because there is no law or judge outside ourselves.

Not laws unto ourselves

However, we are not laws unto ourselves. There are creation-imbedded "laws" and a Creator and Judge who put them there. We still acknowledge vestiges of that law (Catholics call it "natural law") in the social and political regulations we adopt so that we can live together peaceably in families, workplaces, villages, cities and nations.

We understand that there are also God-created laws that apply to the sciences and math. But there's more: God created laws that allow language, art, poetry and music to flourish and endure when combined and manipulated in specific ways. We've been delightedly uncovering all those laws throughout human history, as God intended – at least until we decided they don't exist.

The peculiar power of music-and-text

The music, poetry, literature and art that endures through time does so because its human creators discovered and obeyed – unwittingly or more overtly – our Creator's universe-imbedded laws. That there are such laws or "norms" in creation, the use of which results in soul- and spirit-elevating music, art and literature was once a universal view in Western civilization.

Briton Stuart Townend and Irishman Keith Getty are Christians who know something about the norms for music and poetry. Their song "In Christ Alone" is a fine example of a contemporary hymn with musical-poetic integrity and real biblical depth.

Getty's tune is easily singable by a congregation – or a soloist. (Many contemporary songs used in worship are intended for solo singers. When they have a wide ranging or awkwardly leaping tunes, not easily remembered, they fail as congregational songs.) There's enough repetition in Getty's tune to make it easy to remember but not so much as to create boredom or annoyance. The tune lends itself to various harmonizations and instrumentations, from the traditional four-parts accompanied by organ, to jazz-inspired piano and/or the gamut of other instruments, acoustic or electric. The rhythm is slightly syncopated; it's catchy but not in a way that trivializes its serious text.

Townend's four-stanza rhyming text reads smoothly and meaningfully as spoken poetry, a sign of a well-crafted hymn text. The lyrics express the absolute sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for our salvation. We sing from a first-person perspective: we each make the confession "in Christ alone my hope is found" – but Getty's tune aids us in doing it corporately. The combination of confessional text and singable tune is powerful, the kind of power that elicits tears and provokes soul-searching. That spiritual-emotional power was potently demonstrated in the Christian Reformed Church on Sun., May 19, in what is surely a unique singing of this hymn: nearly 100,000 members from dozens of CRC's across the continent sang it "to grieve and worship in solidarity" with their sister church in Ancaster, Ont., after the murder of Tim Bosma.

*No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand.
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.
Stanza 4, "In Christ Alone" ♪*

Marian Van Til (mvanul@roadrunner.com) is a former CC editor living in Youngstown, N.Y. She blogs at ReformedRevelry.wordpress.com.

ARTFUL EYE

Hail Storm

Day before,
marble-sized hail thundered down
with a rushing wind.
The earth was abused
with a white curse.



Hardly a leaf is not shred,
the produce bruised.
Among the sunflowers,
with heads already bowed,
one, with a broken back,
does a face plant.
Even the hardy kale
is not that hale.
The garden is suspended between
the living and the dead.

"Self," I say, "It's not so bad.
The season is almost done –
most has been gathered in.
We are safe, and even the hens
are clucking over eggs as before."

But I am close to tears.
The remembrance of battered years
drums on my inner ears.
I fear the scrabbling,
in hail storm and maelstrom,
of the dreadful chaos
struggling to be released.
I strain to hear instead
the faint rustle of the Spirit
hovering between the darkness
and the void.
I listen for an almighty
cackling in the nest.

"All is not lost," I say,
and to make it true,
I salvage what I can
for my bride . . .
a fallen pepper,
a few dozen beans,
and best of all:
miniature marvels,
marble-sized tomatoes,
(she loves them so)
orange and red,
a delight to my eyes.



JOE VELTMAN

And hovering like I am
between the darkness
and the day,
straining to be released,
I pray I might
even speak a little
light.

Joe Veltman

Joe Veltman is the pastor at Calvary Community Church, New Berlin, Wis. He enjoys painting, photography and writing poetry.

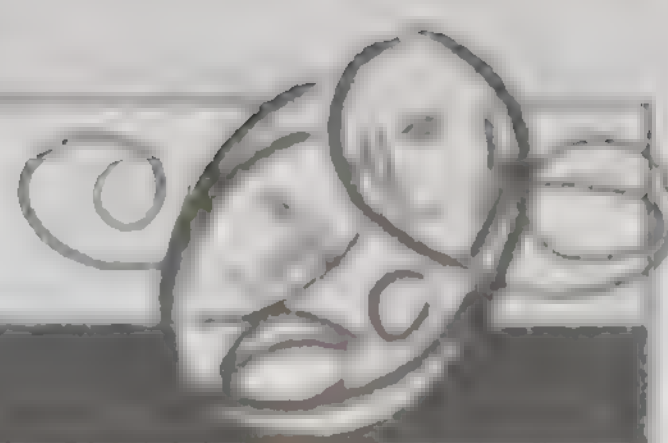


Columns



Gathering Light

Emily Wierenga



How the church has objectified women (and what we can do to change that)

I'm thin. But I feel fat in a swimsuit. I feel very fleshy and obvious in a swimsuit. I can't pretend away my curves. I can't pretend away my stretch marks or flat chest or the

scar from when I burned my calf on a scooter.

I can't hide, and that's hard for me as a woman. I feel safest when I hide.

So when we go to the Hot Springs in Banff I walk stiffly into a pool crowded with men, old and young, all lined up and sunburned, women and little girls in their polka-dot bikinis and I quickly slide into the water to escape.

I can't relax and Trent is watching me, slouched in my tankini, and he tells me to look up. To see the mountains beyond the Hot Springs and I try. But there are so many eyes. The women silently judging each other and hating themselves and the boys and men rating us.

My preschooler-sons are oblivious in their Bob the Builder swim shorts. But I grieve for the day when they join the line of male youth along the edge of the pool. When they see women and girls for what movies, magazines and even the church has made them out to be: objects.

Beloved

I say church, because there's a shame-culture amongst Christians which has wounded women and made us afraid of our bodies. It's a culture that makes us feel guilty if we don't wear dresses to church or purity rings on our fingers; it's a culture that rules with fear.

I say church, because we often don't treat women and girls as persons – as beloved creations made by a loving Father – but as icons. Now, don't get me wrong: I am a big proponent of purity and modest. But not because they chalk one up for the cause of Christianity. I believe in them because, if expressed in love, they truly treasure the humanity of a person.

I'm not sure what the answer is. I know the church is just trying to inspire righteousness in its young people, to help them shine like stars in a dark world, but those stars just want to fade

because there's little love in it all.

The Bible talks a lot more about love than it does about fear, and I think if we were to approach modesty and purity with love for our bodies instead of fear of religion; if we were to treat our skin with reverence and our clothing as symbols of respect for that skin; if we were to believe that we were divine instruments rather than sexual beings, then maybe we wouldn't slouch so much in the pool.

I wonder how the church's more limited view of modesty and purity is hurting our perspective of God's deep love for us, too, and I wonder if by not addressing the many other facets of relationships we're limiting our communication with our Father?

Treasured

Instead of focusing so much on sex and sexuality, let's focus on Christ as lover of our soul. Let's focus on Communion, about how it's Christ taking the cup of redemption at Passover and then suddenly turning it into a traditional Jewish wedding proposal, offering this cup that we could choose or not choose and saying it's not only wine but that it's his blood and that he loves us.

What if, instead of telling women that they should dress a certain way, the church asked them to bring honesty, nurture and a servant's heart into all relationships, asked them to see the hugeness of Christ's love and bring it into every part of life?

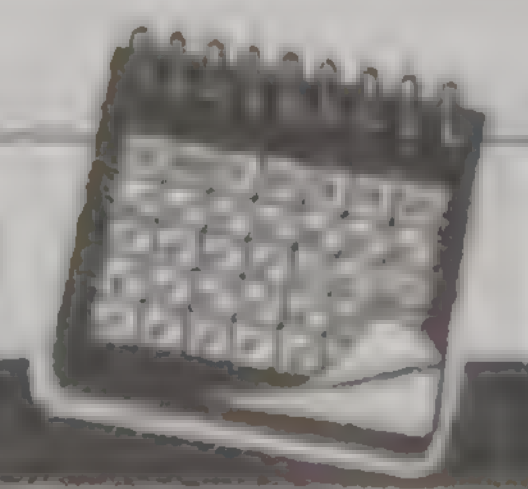
What if the church saw women as humans, not objects? Treated them as treasured and irreplaceable? What if it helped them to understand the feminine characteristics of God and how they embody those and how their role as women is more than enough, because it is valuable, in and of itself?

Perhaps then much of the anger and shame would defuse. Perhaps then we would no longer need to hide because we'd feel seen, truly seen, not just for our bodies but for our hearts.

Emily Wierenga is the author of *Chasing Silhouettes*, and *Mom in the Mirror: Body Image, Beauty and Life After Pregnancy*. For more info, please visit emilywierenga.com.

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith



I found a small package stuffed in my church mailbox. The gift bag contained three rolls of candy, some Droste chocolates and a folded paper on which was printed: "Thank you for tak-

ing such good care of our precious little ones. It is greatly appreciated. Michelle and Brenda." I'd served in the nursery during VBS. Their thoughtful gesture struck me as emblematic of my recent reading.

I'd just finished *In Search of Sacred Places: Looking for Wisdom on Celtic Holy Lands* by Daniel Taylor. In this gem of a book Taylor explores the physical and metaphysical dimensions of pilgrimage. He visits such sacred sites as Iona, Lindisfarne and Skellig Michael. Along with Taylor, who admits he wasn't well acquainted with Celtic contributions to Christianity, I learned a lot about St. Patrick, Columba, Brigid, Aiden and Dewi the Waterman (St. David of Wales). Taylor ponders their legacy and finds his own religious fervour lacking in comparison. Thankfully he avoids the temptation to idolize these spiritual ancestors but, instead, uses his discomfort as a measuring rod for the prospects of devotional life in our own time. He concludes, "I didn't need to go to Iona to find the holy, and in fact I didn't find it, because I didn't bring it with me. What I did find was more about the possibilities of living attentively, about how one might structure a life – and I don't mean the monastic rule itself – to increase the potential for giving that life meaning and purpose" (156). Why do pilgrims perennially seek out sacred spaces? Because, says Taylor, they're looking for the city that has no foundations, putting physical steps to a religious yearning for home, a home that can finally be found only in a right relationship with God.

Generation me

Contrasting Taylor's examination of the communal life of ancient Celtic monks was an article I'd read recently by David Brooks of *The New York Times* who reports on a study that could only have been conceived and executed in our digital age. Based on a Google database of 5.2 million books published between 1500 and 2008, the study indicates that between 1960 and 2008 *individualistic* words and phrases increasingly overshadowed *communal* words and phrases. In the space of about a half a century, words relating to "I" and "self" and "personalized" outpaced words like "community," "united" or "common good."

Using the same search engine evalua-

In search of sacred places . . . and finding them at home

tion, further studies demonstrate that words relating to *moral virtue* like "bravery" and "fortitude" are on the decrease and *social science* words like "preference" and "information" are on the upswing. Brooks concludes, "So the story I'd like to tell is this: Over the past half-century, society has become more individualistic. As it has become more individualistic, it has also become less morally aware, because social and moral fabrics are inextricably linked. The atomization and demoralization of society have led to certain forms of social breakdown, which government has tried to address, sometimes successfully and often impotently."

'God-with-us'

Set next to the society Brooks describes – a splintering culture increasingly less able to make room for anyone other than "me" – the Celtic monastic life, a life that strove for togetherness by way of solemn vow, seems somehow less antiquated and naïve. Taylor notes that the monks often built a *vallum* around their monasteries, a low mound that served no defensive purpose and was intended simply to delineate the grounds

as a "holy place," terrain set apart for a community bound by fidelity to one another and to God. That cute little gift bag of treats suddenly seemed to me to be a similar kind of sign, a portable *vallum* denoting my own sacred space. My holy place is that steeped white building down the street where VBS coordina-



A small, thoughtful gesture brings God near.

tors, volunteer teachers, nursery attendants and neighbourhood kids cobble together a "we" by the grace of God-With-Us, who is, as Barbara Brown Taylor writes, "Not the God-Up-There who answers our prayers by lifting us out of our lives, but the God who comes to us in the midst of them . . ." (24).

Yes, I've moved on – from one Taylor to another. Now I'm reading Barbara Brown Taylor's book, *Home by Another Way*. In a chapter called "The Company of Strangers," she outlines this hope: "In the church, we are dared to believe that it is God who makes us a community and not we ourselves, and that our differences are God's best tools for opening us up to the truth that is bigger than we are" (46). The gift bag on my kitchen table speaks to me of that kind of hope – that the church of our time can be a force to help renew public life, that it can function as a clearly visible *inuksuk* in a barren tundra of individualism and isolationism, standing up in Christ's name for the sacredness of linked arms and connected lives.

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is Features Editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.

Columns

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove



I will never forget a gentleman who came to see me a long time ago when I was a counselor at a local community agency. He was very angry when he walked into my office.

"What's troubling you?" I asked, hoping to avoid a confrontation.

"Have you ever been on a waiting list for six weeks when you have something urgent to talk about?" he demanded, looking me straight in the eyes.

"Okay, let's start now," I said quickly, wanting to soothe him.

He told me he had wanted to discuss the argument he and his wife had had six weeks ago, which he could not remember well anymore. The only thing he remembered was that the argument was typical.

I asked him what a "typical" argument looked like.

So he launched into an account of how angry his wife makes him whenever they have a discussion. He had lots of examples to prove his point. The gist was that he became angry with her whenever she did not say things in the manner he liked. If her tone, word choice or request was not right, he got mad. No matter how she expressed herself, he wanted her to say it differently so that he would not get angry.

It took a number of sessions to encourage him to accept that *he* was responsible for his anger towards his wife. Most of the time he learned under protest, because he was more comfortable blaming his wife. At the same time he was courageous enough to hang onto therapy and become a more positive and well functioning spouse.

Using blame

Carl Alasko, author of *Beyond Blame: Freeing Yourself from the Most Toxic Form of Emotional Bullsh*t*, says that we use blame when we want to change another person's behaviours through criticism, accusation, punishment or humiliation; when we need to vent a feeling such as anxiety, anger, resentment, pain or fear; when we attempt to escape personal responsibility by shifting it onto someone else; and when we try to protect ourselves from being seen as wrong or bad" (8).

At a minimum, blame serves these four purposes. But Alasko points out that in actual practice we use blame far more often! A subtle example would be in "passive-aggressive behaviour, such as being chronically late, constantly forgetting things, lapsing into moodiness, isolating into silence, over working and

Confusion reigns in understanding 'blame'

so on." Mistaken beliefs

Unfortunately, we have accumulated a number of mistaken beliefs about how blame works and what it does. Many of us assume that blame assigns responsibility and solves problems. That is why we think blame is necessary. Wrong! It doesn't necessarily solve anything. We also believe that criticizing another person's behaviour, ideas or feelings is the way to help them change. But that doesn't work well either. Finally, we believe that defending ourselves by counterattacking the other person will stop their accusations and criticism. Also wrong.

Deep roots

Blame has been with us since the beginning of time. Let's not forget how Adam first blamed God and then Eve for his fall into sin when he said, "The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree. . . ." And how did Eve respond? She said: "The serpent deceived me. . . ."

At the same time, contemporary science has shown that threats to our physical as well as psychological well-being (including blame) jumpstart the amygdala, an almond-sized node that's part of our limbic system, which floods our body with adrenaline and preps us for "fight or flight." In other words, the "fight or flight" response is equally active in the face of physical or psychological danger. Even the perception of an attack can trigger it, which can result in a spiral of negative reactions (the blame game).

Blame is destructive

The problem with blame is that it easily escalates between spouses, family members, communities and nations – resulting, in the worst cases, in divorce, life-long family schisms, war or genocide. Unfortunately, blaming others has become such an integral part of our thinking and behaviour that we don't know how to do life differently. We desperately need to find another way of approaching and solving our problems, as the gentleman I mentioned at the beginning of the column managed to do.

In next month's column: "From 'blame' to 'positive accountability.'"

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and member of the Fleetwood CRC in Surrey, B.C.

Words from Wild Horses

Kenny Warkenlin



On June 20, when Exodus International announced its closure at the Annual Freedom Conference, it was big news. Many editorials, blog posts and news articles have been

written about the closure and about the apology that Alan Chambers extended toward those who have been hurt by the ministry of Exodus International (see CC, July 8). I was the Canadian Exodus Regional Representative, and I've deliberately taken time to process this before writing about it myself.

Before I comment on the closure of Exodus, I need to bring context to my experience with the organization. In 2005, God encountered me. It was life-changing. He met me, a gay-identified man, while I was going through a tough transition. I feebly cried out to God to help me and he gave me a choice to leave my Egypt. Would I go through the wilderness to the promised land, or continue on in the life I had made for myself? I chose to follow God, and with a joy that I had not experienced before, I chose to walk away from identifying myself as a gay man and to trust that God would meet my every need.

Many people couldn't understand my decision; being gay had been my liberation, which I proudly waved around for all to see. But when I encountered God, who asked me to live differently, I proudly waved his banner over my life instead. I chose to be transparent about my journey with same sex attraction, knowing that life wasn't necessarily going to be easy or free of struggles – rather, that I would face my sinful humanness for the rest of my life.

I attended my first Exodus Conference in 2005 in North Carolina. It impacted my life! I heard testimonies of people walking the journey of sanctification. I attended workshops where I learned how to live a disciplined life and how to honour God with my sexuality. At no time did I perceive or interpret that I would ever be free of this struggle. Yet I fully recognize that each individual interprets and perceives things differently, due in part to their own journey and where they are at in their lives. God had already told me that life in the wilderness wasn't going to be easy, but I had this joy and peace that transcended my own understanding.

Extended family

I met other men and women who shared their own experiences and it encouraged my faith. I was reminded of Scriptures that speak of always encouraging and spurring one another on toward the finish line. It was clear God had placed people into my life to do that, for which I am forever grateful.

Worship was probably the biggest highlight for me. I wrote in my journal that I had experienced hundreds of desperate people,

Exodus shuts down: Part I

who recognized their desperate need of Jesus! Worship came out of this place and it was powerful. Why? Because people were taking their eyes off themselves to worship the one true God.

I spent the next eight years attending both the Exodus International Freedom Conferences and the Exodus Regional Conferences. I always left encouraged, built up, strengthened and fed! For the most part, these conferences gave me a BOOST! I was already knit together with a local church community: I was known by others and was working in full time ministry. But these conferences gave me the ability to talk with others in similar ministry, serve attendees through prayer and encouragement – they were like my extended family. They were like those family members who fully "get" you, even if you don't see them all the time.

Some attendees were not "known" in their local communities, and so these conferences gave them the ability to be known in a safe environment where they too could be encouraged and supported.

I think, fundamentally speaking, the breakdown of effectiveness begins when local churches or church families send people away to receive ministry. When members have to go outside of their own community to deal with the messiness of life, regardless of the issues they face, because the local community isn't equipped to walk closely with those seeking help, that's not ideal.

I know hundreds of people who struggle with same gender attraction. Yet, sadly, I only know a handful of people who attended an Exodus Freedom Conference without having struggled themselves with same gender issues. Those who did attend are the people who know what it means to become a safe place for others. They know mess and welcome it, even if they don't fully know how to minister effectively. What they learned is that they too need Jesus desperately to meet them as they walk with others.

When Exodus International closed, some people grieved; others rejoiced. Regardless of your perspective, I am thankful for the role that the Exodus Freedom Conferences played in my life. I received a spiritual booster shot, which equipped me to go home to what can be a dry and weary land.

Next month, Kenny will share more of his thoughts on Exodus's closure.

Kenny is a writer, painter and photographer passionate about gender, sexuality, culture, community and how these pertain to the Body of Christ. Kenny enjoys getting his hands dirty in the garden and tries to get out golfing as much as possible. He lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with his wife Paula and their daughter, Phoebe, where he's working on his first book.

News

CRC Pastors take a step back from Christian schools

Continued from page 2

They are also a model for the congregation, and a leader in the council room, which is the body that is charged with encouraging support for Christian schools (Art. 71). In other words, they are the "brand representative" of the congregation and denomination, and so they bear a heavier burden of accountability. One pastor recognized this, and when he decided to switch to the public system, he reported it to his council. Another pastor humbly admitted, "I'm open to be held more accountable on this."

Ambivalences aside, I gathered a list of "best practices" with regards to congregational support for Christian schools. Inside church, I heard of offerings and budget lines for Christian educational institutions, a Fund for Assisting Christian Education, congregational prayers, sermon illustrations from the school and Christian Education Sunday. The churches also get involved on the school property, too: pastors do chapels, graduation speeches, members teach, coach, volunteer and get involved in fundraisers, anniversaries, campaigns, renovations and serve on school boards. Pastors did coffee and prayer with principals and teachers, encouraging them in their counter-cultural vocation. Choosing Christian schools for your children is an obvious way, but not the only way, to show support.

The Synodical Report of 2005

Significantly, in over 25 interviews with various CRC ministers on this issue, only one of them mentioned the Synod Report of 2005 – over 130 pages of pastoral advice on "Christian Day School Education." The report addresses the above tensions directly and quite passionately, reviewing the long history of the CRCNA and Christian schooling to address issues of mission, inclusion, rising costs and current struggles.

The report insists that school choice is a matter of Christian liberty and parental responsibility, and that these decisions must be respected. Conflicts in school choice in the congregation can be viewed as opportunities for reconciliation and restoration, with professional mediators if necessary. These differences are also an opportunity to practice something beyond the old enforced uniformity: unity in the midst of difference; listening instead of judging; accepting rather than manipulating.

The report simultaneously argues that in the context of growing secularism and consumerism in North American education, the CRCNA, now more than ever, must unapologetically articulate our calling to establish and maintain Christian schools. This on-going project is integral to our Reformed identity and our world-wide mission of proclaiming Christ's Lordship. To shy away from the task diminishes the



rich legacy and real blessing that these schools have been to our countries and the world.

At this time evangelical bodies in Africa and Asia are connecting with Calvin College and other Reformed educational agencies and asking: we know how to evangelize, but now we want to help rebuild our country, and offer Christian leaders in politics, business and the arts. How can we train our young people to integrate their faith with these cultural pursuits in a way that is indigenous to our country?

The report was actually sent back for additional work by Synod in 2003. One significant request from Synod was that the named theological incentives of covenant and kingdom were insufficient and they needed to elaborate on one more: mission. Christian schools are a participation in God's mission in his world. The study committee agreed, and added to their initial report, basically saying that covenant, kingdom and mission cannot be separated from the vision for Christian education any more than they can be separated out of the unfolding narrative of the Bible. To the extent that those who choose Christian schools – or government funded schools – split up these theological themes they have undermined the calling of God in our lives. You cannot pit covenant against mission.

The 2005 report, which reads like an epistle to the church, has much to offer congregations; one of the congregations in this classis, Stratford CRC, set up a committee to study the report. The committee came up with a number of recommendations, of which one was to set up a fund for tuition assistance for all Christian schooling families in their church for their first three years of schooling, with an additional fund for those with greater needs. This past year they dispensed \$56,000 to families in their congregation and now local Baptist and Mennonite churches are doing the same.

Christian schooling is a responsibility and joy that requires a risky step of faith.

We need to constantly remind ourselves of just how challenging tuition costs can be on some families: a family of three can easily require over \$200,000 for its k-12 Christian school career. This is a sacrifice – or more accurately, a spiritual investment – in our children and in God's kingdom. It is, Synod reminds us, a covenant community's responsibility and joy, and not just a parental responsibility. We all make vows at baptism to "help instruct this child in the faith" and Christian schooling is one significant way to fulfill that promise.

"I challenged a rich man in our congregation who had a second home in Florida," said one pastor. "I suggested it was not right for him to have two homes while his brother and sister were living from paycheck to paycheck to make Christian school payments. He never spoke to me again."

Unity on mission, diversity on choice

The conversation at Huron Classis was too brief. Most said that the discussion was just opened up in the small group session. Some shed tears, others were silent, and some spoke with conviction about staying the course.

I overheard one farmer-elder say to his pastor, who was sitting beside him: "I disagreed when you pulled your children out of the Christian school. But I prayed about it, and I got some peace on it. We love you, and we will always love you, even though we disagree."

What this small classis study shows is that our church is diversifying. The CRC in Canada used to be a uniform community held together by ethnic glue and subtle and not-so-subtle pressures to conform to the group. When community pressure is more manipulation than pastoral guidance, we have sinned against each other. Today, the sin might be in the opposite direction: in fear of offending, we have failed to be sure our young families are fully informed about their choices, and we have failed in our moral support for the teachers and administrators who look to the church for encouragement.

We now have acculturated to North American individualist practices, and the new day calls us to embrace a unity in our diversity, one in which we voluntarily seek to bind ourselves to worship and do ministry together. This transition from uniformity to unity requires holding on to our mission and vision, and our church order, but doing so with a load of charity. The destination, God's kingdom of love and light, cannot be different from the road. That Spirit-led love and light must be what takes our congregations and Christian schools forward into the future.

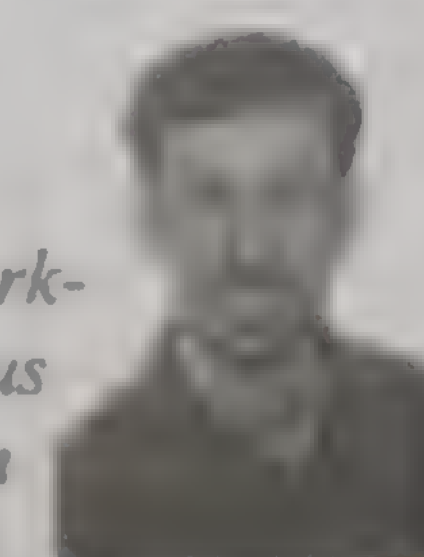
We also have many public and Catholic school teachers in our congregations. For many of them, they are at odds with the mission of their school or at least its cultural values. They also need prayers and encouragement so that they can be faithful in what is sometimes an extremely diverse and needy educational setting. "You don't know what it's like to have students with drug addicts for parents, who come to school without breakfast," said one public school teacher to me. They also have to deal as members with a large, powerful union that discriminates against Christian educators in its decision-making and political influence. We need to support them, and we, in turn, need them to be a voice for Christian schooling alternatives in Ontario.

Christian schools are not the solution to all that ails the CRCNA. But neither is abandoning them to their own scant resources in the name of a truncated understanding of mission. Suggesting we have become too familiar with our own gift, Jamie Smith has called Reformed institutions "buried treasure." Does familiarity breed contempt in some hearts?

There are two families who came from a different tradition to our CRC congregation because of a gratefulness and passion for the local Christian school. "You don't know how rare a community like yours is today," they have said. "In our fragmented society, most churches are a community for an hour on Sunday. But here, people see each other during the week, work side by side at the school, and they really know and care for each other."

The integrated education system in Alberta seems like good model to explore, but Ontario politics and public teachers' unions will not allow for it anytime soon. Christian schools are a precarious project: a vast institutional undertaking that is not supported by our government, mass media, other Christian groups or even some fellow Reformed members. But it is that narrow way that is our calling, and our gift on the landscape of Ontario's educational institutions. Richard Mouw says we have been called "the Levites of evangelicalism," and if we were a religious order of the Catholic church, it would be said that Christian educational institutions are our *charism* – our divine gift to the planet. To steward this gift and task is an act of tremendous faith, faith in God's covenant promises, faith in God's kingly rule over all things, and faith in God's mission of love and justice – not just for ourselves and our children – but for God's whole world. >

Peter Schuurman is working on his PhD in Religious Studies (U Waterloo) from his home in Guelph.



Anniversaries



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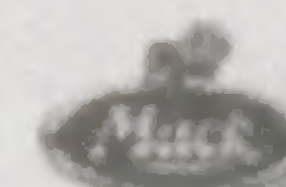
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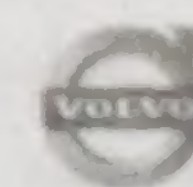
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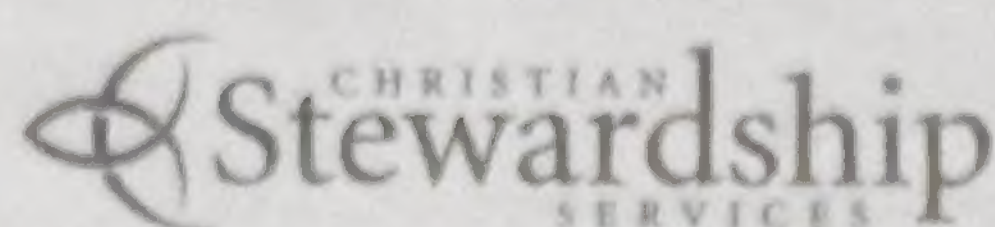
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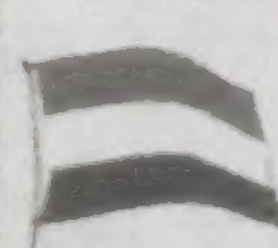
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Aug 25 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. John Zantingh will be preaching. DVDs are available

Aug 28 8th annual Dutch Hymn Sing, at 1:30 p.m. in the Westmount Christian Reformed Church, 405 Drury Lane, **Strathroy**. Call Marianne Kingma at 519-245-039 or email - jmkingma7@gmail.com

Sep 8 25th Anniversary: Thankful for God's faithfulness, New Life CRC of **Guelph**, Ont. celebrates its 25th anniversary. Praise God there is new life for all!

Oct 5 Netherlands Bazaar, **Thornhill** Community Centre, 7755 Bayview Ave.: Marketplace 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Features: Dutch delicacies, bake sale, groceries, gifts, handicrafts, books and much more. Free admission. For other information, visit our website: netherlandsbazaar.com, or phone 905-477-1243.

Oct 5-6 Maranatha CRC in **Belleville**, Ont. will celebrate its 60th anniversary with a BBQ and open house, banquet. Celebration service Sunday morning. For details, see ad or contact the church at 613-962-2062 ext. 200 or email info@maranatha-church.com.

Oct 16 Leendert Kooij and the Ontario Christian Music Assembly (OCMA), Andre Knevel, Liselotte Rokyta and others will host a Benefit Concert, 7:30 pm at the Hebron Christian Reformed Church, **Whitby**, Ont. If you wish to have additional information contact Rob Datema - rob@lighthousecentre.ca or 416-535-6262.

Oct 19 Leendert Kooij and the Ontario Christian Music Assembly (OCMA), Andre Knevel, Liselotte Rokyta and others will host a Benefit Concert, 7:30 pm at the Georgetown Christian Reformed Church, **Georgetown**, Ont. For more information contact Rob Datema - rob@lighthousecentre.ca or 416-535-6262.

Oct 19 Day of Encouragement Hamilton District Christian High, **Ancaster**, Ont. Details online at diaconalministries.com

Oct 25 Christian Festival Concert. Toronto. See ad for details.

Oct 31-Nov 2 Andreas Center Conference. Dordt College. More info at: dordt.edu/events/conference2013/

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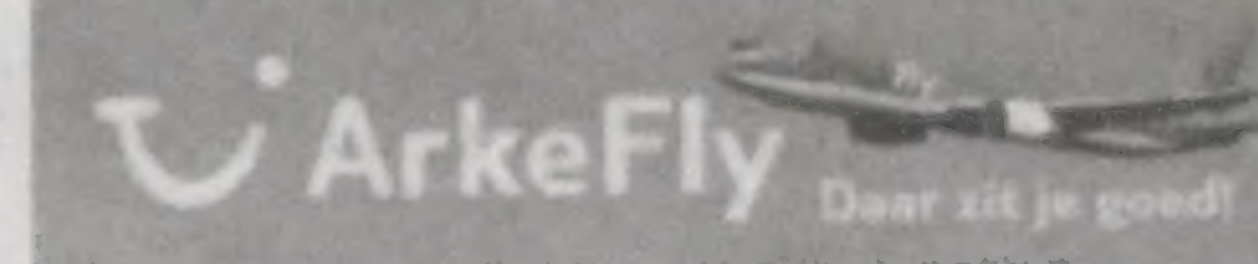
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See article p. 20

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News

Tim's Tribute a new legacy for Tim Bosma

Angela Reitsma Bick

Three months after the tragic death of Tim Bosma, his widow Sharlene has started a charity to support other families of homicide victims in the Hamilton area. Tim went missing May 6 while on a test drive with two men who claimed to be interested in buying his truck. Even before Tim's death was confirmed, the Bosma family received an outpouring of love and support from friends, strangers and the Christian Reformed community ("When sorrows like sea billows roll: Tim Bosma and the body of Christ," CC May 27). A trust fund was set up to manage the flood of donations. Sharlene says she was very blessed by that money, which was used to pay the mortgage, help bury Tim properly and – incredibly – make truck payments for 10 weeks after Tim's death. But not everyone receives that kind of help, which is why Sharlene wanted to set up Tim's Tribute.



Along with the financial support came hundreds of cards and one original song. Jen Slocumb, originally from Ancaster and part of a folk duo called Martha's Trouble, wrote "Prayer for a broken heart" in honour of Tim.

Say a prayer for the broken heart / who's left to carry on [...]

Momma hold your little girl / and we'll hold your hand.

On August 9, Martha's Trouble held a benefit concert at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington, Ont, with all proceeds going to Tim's Tribute.

Michelle DenBak, Tim's sister, says her family feels "so blessed by strangers wanting to do this for Tim." The charity has been established through Christian Stewardship Services.

"I need for myself for there to be something positive that goes forward [from this]," Sharlene told CTV's Canada AM. The media attention was "an opportunity to do something good with this," she explained. She also wanted her daughter, in future, to Google Tim's name and find a positive link. Helping other people was second nature for Tim, and now – through Tim's Tribute – "we can continue that part of Tim. That can become his legacy, something better than what happened to him," Sharlene says.

Tim would have turned 33 on August 12. ✂

See p. 19 for information on how you can donate to Tim's Tribute.

Provincial government plans to reintroduce controversial changes to sex ed program

Patrick Craine

Ontario's government has promised to reintroduce a controversial new sex ed program but says it will not be ready for the 2013-2014 school year. The current curriculum was released in 1997 and sex ed proponents say it's time for an update.

But many traditionally-minded citizens, including Christians, Muslims and Jews, fear the new version could intrude on parents' terrain and easily confuse impressionable young children about basics of sexual morality.

The government attempted to introduce a new sex ed program in 2010, but then-Premier Dalton McGuinty shelved the project after a backlash from parents and conservative groups. He called for wider consultation.

Critics objected to numerous aspects of the program: it begins earlier than before, in Grade 1, by naming specific body parts; introduces concepts such as "gender identity" and "sexual orientation" in Grade 3; and teaches about oral and anal sex in Grade 7.

Premier Kathleen Wynne, who had overseen the development of the 2010 version while Minister of Education, promised to introduce a new sex ed program at her first press conference as Premier in January.

But in June, Wynne's Minister of Education, Liz Sandals, said the program would not be released in time for September. Even while the govern-

ment apparently moves slowly on sex ed, to the consternation of some, two recent developments have stoked the controversy.

Inappropriate

First, on July 8th Wynne's former deputy education minister, Benjamin Levin, was charged with producing and distributing child pornography. Levin had served as the top public servant in the education department from 2004 to 2009, during the time when the 2010 sex ed program was being developed, and critics have suggested the program should be re-examined as a result.

Second, on July 22nd Minister Sandals told a press conference that when a new sex ed program is brought to her desk, she would sign off on it without reading it. "I couldn't even tell you right now what's currently under review," she said, according to footage released by Sun Media.

The Minister also indicated that the new program would remain in the original format introduced in 2010. "That's the commitment that both [former] Premier McGuinty and Premier Wynne have made," she said.

But as the government moves forward on a new program, the very notion of sex ed in schools continues to divide the Christian community.

Kathy Vandergrift, a consultant on public ethics and children's rights, told *Christian Courier* that the controversy

in 2010 came more as a result of poor consultations than problems with the content.

"Education about reproductive health is a shared responsibility between parents, educational institutions and governments," she said. "All parties need to respect the right of young people to have access to age-appropriate information, especially when it is important for their health and well-being. That is often forgotten in the current battles between interest groups. Dialogue that includes young people is needed to determine what is in the best interests of young people, which should be the top priority."

On the other hand, Mark Penninga, executive director of the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA), said parents ought to take charge of forming their children in the area of sexuality.

"The worldviews of the people shaping the system will have a profound impact on many impressionable minds and ultimately all of society," he said. "A secular humanist State will naturally teach children to set their own guidelines for appropriate sexual conduct, irrespective of their parent's beliefs." ✂

Patrick Craine is the Canadian Bureau Chief for LifeSiteNews.com and lives with his wife Jenna and two children west of Ottawa.



ODDS & TRENDS

Doubly blind date

Lady and the Tramp realized they were in love over a bowl of pasta. For Rodd and Venice, romance bloomed at a training course for seeing-eye dogs.



The guide dogs simply couldn't get enough of each other during the intensive course in Shrewsbury, England in March 2012. Even when their visually impaired owners tried to keep them apart, Rodd and Venice would find each other and snuggle together under a table.

One thing led to another, until the very public proposal on camera for the British ITV show *Me and My Guide Dog*. The wedding ceremony planned for next spring will include the dogs walking down the aisle with their owners. The wedding cake will be adorned with bones and paw prints.

Doggy depression



Not all dogs are as lucky as Rodd and Venice, the English guide dogs. A dog with the blues sounds like the premise of a Gary Larson cartoon, but ap-

parently, it's no joke. According to Dog Channel, the first step in trying to assist your pup is to change the diet to raw food, and use vitamin and mineral supplements to complete the meal in terms of nutritional value.

If the new diet doesn't make a difference, think of significant events that occurred before your pooch started showing signs of depression. It's possible that your dog is mourning the loss of a friend – whether it be human or canine. Pups also get down when they aren't getting enough attention. If you recently brought home a baby, new puppy or began a demanding job, your dog might feel neglected. The remedy to this is to make time for your pup by taking trips to the dog park and playing more. If you can't be home, either hire a dog-sitter or put on DogTV to keep Fido occupied.

Bovine beauties

If you wonder whether hiring a dog-sitter or providing DogTV for your favourite canine wouldn't be a stewardly use of your resources, remind yourself that at least you (probably)



aren't lavishing beauty treatments on a Holstein. In June, the annual German Holstein show took over the city of Oldenburg, with the two-day event. It was won by "Loh Nastygirl," who beat out "Lady Gaga," "Madonna" and "Grace." The event is also a showcase for the cow hair-dressers, who trim cows' leg and belly hair to better display their veins. Said one dresser, "It is just like with us people – primping helps." Groomed or not, cows with powerful legs, bulging udders and a strong bone structure are the favourites. ✂

– Sarah Brouwer